

**The role of public libraries in delivering local studies services,  
with a case study of Wiltshire**

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## **Summary**

### **Background**

Since Heritage Centres appeared there has been debate about whether public libraries are a suitable repository for local studies materials and services. Current factors affecting public libraries have particular implications for specialist services such as local studies provision and there are questions about whether public libraries are capable of providing the service.

### **Aims and objectives**

The aim of this research was to examine the role of libraries in delivering local studies services. There were four objectives: to assess the current level of provision in public libraries; to assess the skills of library staff in delivering the service; identify training needs; and to seek managers' views on the role of public libraries and history centres in delivering local studies services.

### **Methods**

A case study approach was adopted in order to closely examine the issues raised in the literature review. Mixed methods were used to gather data. This included a staff survey to measure the first three objectives, and semi-structured interviews to gain the managerial perspective.

### **Results**

The staff survey showed that services were well used and libraries play an important role in service provision. It confirmed the view in the literature that staff are under-confident in delivering local studies services. The survey and interviews confirmed that new methods of training need to be adopted to improve services. Managers agreed that public libraries play an important role in service delivery and that a positive relationship with the History Centre could solve some challenges facing local studies provision.

### **Conclusions**

The research has confirmed that both libraries and history centres have advantages and disadvantages regarding local studies provision. It has also shown that through a close relationship, where there is a clear structure of provision, many challenges facing local studies provision can be overcome to the advantage of both collections and users.

## **DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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## **STATEMENT 1**

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, then the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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## **STATEMENT 2**

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## **Abbreviations**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>ALA</b>    | American Library Association                                 |
| <b>CILIP</b>  | Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals |
| <b>ECDL</b>   | European Computer Driving Licence                            |
| <b>ICT</b>    | Information and Communications Technology                    |
| <b>LAMSAC</b> | Local Authorities Management and Computer Committee          |
| <b>LISA</b>   | Library and Information Science Abstracts                    |
| <b>LISTA</b>  | Library and Information Science and Technology Abstracts     |
| <b>LSG</b>    | Local Studies Group (part of CILIP)                          |
| <b>MLA</b>    | Museums and Libraries Association                            |
| <b>RUSA</b>   | Reference and User Services Association (part of ALA)        |
| <b>WSHC</b>   | Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre                         |



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Most public libraries offer some level of local studies material and services, ranging from a shelf of local history books in a small village library, to a dedicated local studies department in a larger city library. These resources are used by a wide range of people ranging from the amateur to academic. The mission statement of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) local studies group states that:

Local Studies collections, and those engaged with the management and delivery of services associated with them, make a significant contribution to fostering and promoting community identity and cohesion, and improving the quality of people's lives, by preserving and providing equality of access to our diverse local and national written and pictorial heritage. It is a core element of public library provision and, as such, it is fundamental to a thriving economy, democracy, culture and civilisation.

(CILIP, 2012)

While most library professionals would not disagree with the ideal represented in this statement, the reality of local studies provision can be somewhat different. A number of issues affecting public libraries in general are having a significant impact on local studies services in particular.

Current budgetary pressures affect all library departments but can perhaps be more keenly felt in areas that are considered 'specialist'. Cuts in the number of professional staff can result in previously specialist posts being absorbed by 'generic' librarians or library assistants who are often unable through lack of training to provide a comparable level of service (Barber, 2007; Holt, 1996; Miller, 1984; Paul, 1988; Dewe, 2002).

Moreover, the digitisation of collections and the increase in online resources has widened public access to material. Digitisation and the internet have added an ever-increasing list of resources for local studies, with obvious implications for staff training requirements (Holt, 1999; Reid, 2003; Reid & Macafee, 2007; Rowley, 1996).

The lack of an appropriate level of training can have a serious impact on the quality of service provision and is a major issue arising in much of the literature on the topic (Barber, 2007; Bateman, 2012; Holt, 1999; Paul, 1988; Reid, 2003, Smith, 2002).

Heritage centres are increasingly popular as a way of conveniently combining services and expertise under one roof (Ansell, 1987; Dewe, 2003; Friggens, 1998). With specialist staff and large collections in one location, what are the implications for public library collections and services, and what level of co-operation is there between centralised collections and public library collections?

The changes affecting public library services make it necessary to reappraise the local studies service on offer in public libraries: to what extent should the branch library provide a local studies service where there is a specialist centre; and how do we train staff to deal with enquiries and new services in the absence of specialist librarians?

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

### ***Aim***

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of the public library in the provision of local studies services, and to assess the capability of public

libraries to effectively deliver those services. Wiltshire libraries will be used as a case study.

### ***Objectives***

With this purpose in mind, the research objectives are:

- To assess the current level of local studies resources and services provided in public library branches.
- To assess the level of skills and confidence of local branch staff in using a range of resources to answer local studies enquiries.
- To identify potential training needs
- To assess library managers' perceptions of the role of the public library in providing local studies services where a centralised collection also exists.

### **1.3 Case Study: Wiltshire Library Service**

Wiltshire's population at the 2011 census was 471,000- the fifth largest local authority in the South West region (Wiltshire Intelligence Network, 2012). Wiltshire library service consists of thirty static and five mobile libraries. The number of registered borrowers for the county as at December 2012 was 205,624 and the number of visitors for 2011/12 was 1,959,903 (Wiltshire Council, 2012).

Historically, the main local studies collections were based in Trowbridge and Salisbury Reference Libraries. The Trowbridge collection was the main county collection, overseen by the County Local Studies Librarian. The Records Office

was housed in the same building, though not part of library services. The Salisbury Local Studies Library was overseen by a specialist Local Studies Librarian and had a large collection focused on the southern half of the county. Smaller collections were held in public library branches and were pertinent to their own locality. These were administered as part of the overall library collection by the relevant Community Librarian, overseen by the County Local Studies Librarian.

In 2007 the newly- built Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre combined all heritage services in one location in Chippenham incorporating the Wiltshire Studies Library; Archives; Museums Service; Archaeology; Conservation; and the Wiltshire Buildings Record. The County Local Studies Librarian, now the only specialist local studies librarian, is based there. The Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre is an integrated centre for the history of both Wiltshire and Swindon and contains the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.

Local studies collections of varying sizes remain in public library branches, the largest still at Salisbury, and are maintained by Community Librarians, overseen by the County Local Studies Librarian.

Wiltshire has a strong public library presence containing some significant local studies collections. Much of the material has been relocated to the History Centre for improved storage and access to a more complete collection of resources and expertise on one site. However, local demand remains high for open access to resources in a library environment and local libraries are often the first port-of-call for members of the public (Winterbotham and Crosby,

1998). The issue of access to resources is particularly important for Wiltshire as it is a large rural county with limited public transport.

Budgetary pressures are currently affecting all library authorities and there is a general trend towards fewer professional staff in public libraries. With training budgets also constrained, ensuring library staff are appropriately equipped to meet customer care standards is a growing challenge.

As a reflection of the wider issues raised in the literature review, Wiltshire is ideally placed as a case study for an investigation into the challenges currently facing local studies provision in public libraries.

#### **1.4 Limitations**

Due to the inherent constraints of a small-scale individual research topic, a case study approach was adopted and therefore all the data collection took place in Wiltshire Libraries. Although this research aims to give an indication of the current issues for the provision of local studies within a public library setting, the results cannot be assumed to accurately reflect libraries in other local authorities.

Constraints on time and resources have necessarily narrowed the research topic to a particular aspect of local studies service provision. This research focuses on local studies provision in authorities where a centralised local studies collection in a History or heritage centre co-exists with local collections in public libraries. It also considers whether public library staff are adequately trained to deliver local studies services. The data collection is therefore wholly collected from staff, both managers and frontline library assistants. It is not an

investigation into what the public wish a library service to provide, nor a satisfaction survey based on customer experience.

### **1.5 Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter Two contains a review of the literature relating to this research topic. This will highlight current issues on the topic, as well as giving a wider context to the case study presented in this research. Chapter Three outlines the methods used to conduct this research. Questionnaires and interview questions are attached in the appendices.

The results of this research are presented in Chapter Four, with discussion and analysis of the findings relating to the research aim and objectives presented in Chapter Five.

Finally, Chapter Six draws conclusions from the research and offers a number of recommendations to overcome some of the issues discussed, as well as recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 Literature Review Method

A review of the existing literature on the topic was conducted in order to provide a context for the case study and to gain an understanding of the current issues. Hart (1998, p. 1) emphasizes the importance of a literature review in research projects as “without it you will not acquire an understanding of your topic, of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are.”

The initial search terms were derived from the keywords of the working title of the research project: “local studies” and “public libraries”. These broad search terms were entered into keyword searches on search engines, websites and library catalogues including: *Google*, *Google Scholar* and *Google Books*; *Amazon*; The British Library Catalogue; Primo; Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA).

Results from these initial search terms yielded an abundance of irrelevant titles so the aims and objectives were used to identify more specific areas. Phrase and keyword combinations of the main themes were taken from the research objectives and entered in the search engines, catalogues and indexes. Boolean logic was applied to the various combinations to limit increase the relevance of results.



Journal articles were located using the keyword search on various library catalogues and indexes. Relevant journal articles were printed and sorted by title and abstract into the main theme. This enabled a quick reference guide so the content of articles could be identified easily and any articles with overlapping themes were also obvious. Bibliographies and references were also searched for further reading.

Some relevant articles were found physically browsing the shelves of the university library which had not come to light in the literature search and yielded some chance findings. A *Primo* search for relevant theses was also performed in the university library, and on the general internet. While these were in the field of local studies, they tended to be too specifically focussed in another direction to be of great use in themselves- however, their bibliographies were useful to check for any titles that may have been missed.

## **2.2 Review of the literature**

### ***Introduction***

The field of Local Studies librarianship is ever-changing and has demanded frequent updates in its practice and management. Increasing pressures on public library services in particular have impacted on local studies provision, provoking debate on the best way forward for the management of local studies resources, and the delivery of services to the public. One of the central themes of the discussion is whether local studies materials and users are best served in public libraries, or in heritage centres. Another major theme is how well these

services are being delivered, and the challenges of training public library staff in what has traditionally been seen as a specialist field of librarianship.

The aim of this review is to present the main themes of the topic as they are discussed in the literature, providing a wider context for the case study of Wiltshire Library Service. First it considers the role of the public library in providing a local studies service; secondly, it considers the arguments for centralised collections in History Centres; finally, it looks at the challenges of training library staff and suggestions for training methods to improve the delivery of local studies services.

Throughout the review 'Local studies' is used as the more common term and has been defined by the Library Association as the following:

The term 'local studies', as applied to library local studies collections, covers the local environment in all its physical aspects, including geology, palaeontology, climatology and natural history, and in terms of all human activity within that environment, past, present and future. (Martin, 2002, p. 1)

### **2.2.1 The role of public libraries**

#### ***Guidelines for local studies librarianship***

The Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) produced guidelines on public library provision for English local council portfolio holders (CILIP, 2010). These state that "libraries give identity to a community..." and that a good library service will provide "promotion of local identity and community pride".

The importance of a public library's local studies collection was elaborated upon in the mission statement of CILIP's Local Studies Group:

The Local Studies Group of CILIP believes that Local Studies collections, and those engaged with the management and delivery of services associated with them, make a significant contribution to fostering and promoting community identity and cohesion, and improving the quality of people's lives, by preserving and providing equality of access to our diverse local and national written and pictorial heritage. It is a core element of public library provision and, as such, it is fundamental to a thriving economy, democracy, culture and civilisation.

(CILIP, 2012)

The 2002 Library Association Guidelines for local studies libraries confirmed the important contribution public libraries make to their local communities through the provision of local studies services, stating that it is the responsibility of the Local Studies Librarian to "develop the library's vital role in promoting community awareness, local distinctiveness and social inclusion for all sections of society" (Martin, 2002, p. ix).

It is clearly recognised in national policy that the provision of local studies services in public libraries plays an important role in cultivating community identity and cohesion, and that there are distinct advantages to housing collections within public libraries.

### ***Advantages of delivering local studies services in public libraries***

- **Community identity and cohesion**

Current debate argues that the local public library is essential in maintaining a strong community identity in the face of an increasing online presence (Aabo,

2005; Reid & Macafee, 2007) and that providing local community history is an important part of that mission (Banerjee & Chakrabarty, 2004; Chowdhury, Poulter & McMenemy, 2006).

Chowdhury, Poulter & McMenemy (2006, p. 456) used Ranganathan's five principles to outline their model for the role of the modern library service in serving its community:

1. *Community knowledge is for use*
2. *Every user should have access to his or her community knowledge*
3. *All community knowledge should be made available to its users*
4. *Save the time of the user in creating and finding community knowledge*
5. *Community knowledge grows continually*

Applying Ranganathan's original principles to local studies highlights the true purpose of a local studies collection- it is an evolving record of a community's history and a local public library can be uniquely placed to collect, preserve and provide access to that record.

- **Access**

A major factor that makes the public library so ideally placed to fulfil this role is its ability to increase access to services. As Chowdhury, Poulter and McMenemy (2006, p. 457) emphasised: "Community knowledge becomes valuable only when it can be accessed and used by others." Melrose (Dewe, 2002, p. 54) echoed this statement quoting Dan Greensteins' assertion that "Collections aren't about what you have but about what you provide access to." Moreover, Melrose (2001, p. 14) argued that the "neutral, welcoming

environment” of the public library can make it pivotal in society’s agenda to combat social exclusion, with local studies collections attracting non-users and “acclimatizing” them to the library and its other services.

A clear advantage of a local studies collection being ‘local’, as opposed to centralised, is highlighted by Reid and Macafee (2007, p. 128), who argue that collections “have been built up in the ‘circulating libraries’ of every community” providing “genuine local coverage that is often unique...” Furthermore, the material they contain is often on open shelves and available for loan. (Winterbotham & Crosby, 1998, p. 106).

- **Community History Online**

Recent literature emphasises the necessity of libraries enabling access to community history through online resources (Aabo, 2005; Barry and Tedd, 2008; Reid, 2003; Reid & Macafee, 2007; Smith and Rowley, 2012). Not only does digitisation of local studies material serve a practical purpose in terms of the preservation of original documents (Smith & Rowley, 2012), it further increases community access to resources. Libraries are ideally placed to provide access to online resources. The People’s Network facility provides over sixty-million hours of free internet access a year (Museums and Libraries Association, 2009), which includes access to online subscription sites such as *Ancestry Library Edition*.

Despite the advantages of housing local studies collections in public libraries there are doubts that public libraries have the capacity to perform this service to

the required level, and that pressures on public library services are having a negative effect on local studies provision.

### ***Challenges of delivering local studies services in public libraries***

- **Increasing public expectations in challenging times**

Bott, Dansie and Nurse (Dewe, 1987) highlighted the pressure placed on resources, and particularly on staff, by the burgeoning interest in local and family history, and the complex nature of the enquiries. Sympathy has been widely expressed for the library staff expected to satisfy these needs in the face of dwindling resources (Lilley and Usherwood, 2000; Miller, 1984; Nurse, 1987; Paul, 1988 and 1995; Spacey, Goulding and Murray, 2003; Webster, 2005).

As Winterbotham and Crosby (1998, iv) observed: “For many local historians a typical research project begins in the local studies collection of the library...”

Lack of time, the diverse needs of other library users, and lack of specialist knowledge, impacts the level and quality of service received by the customer. Dansie (Dewe, 1987, p. 114) referred to the 1976 Local Authorities Management Services and Computer Committee (LAMSAC) report which calculated that the amount of time spent on a local history enquiry averaged 10.52 minutes, longer than in any of the other subject areas. Smith (2002, p. 160) agreed that “a comparatively simple enquiry...can occupy a considerable amount of staff time...” Dewe added that library staff “are consulted, often without prior warning, about sources on all aspects and periods of local and

family history” (2002, p. 8) while Petty sympathised that “local studies asks more of junior staff than any other department” (1985, p. 41).

As many local studies departments form part of the reference section, staff also have to deal with everything else that goes on in the library- computer assistance often being the most demanding. When Spacey, Goulding and Murray (2003, p. 61) studied the impact of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in public libraries, they found that “expectations of what public libraries can provide has rapidly grown amidst other initiatives relating to lifelong learning, social inclusion and electronic networking.”

Genealogy is a particularly popular area of enquiry with users and the pressure this places on library staff was acknowledged throughout the literature (Durie, 2008; Nurse, 1987; Raymond, 2001). Harvey reiterated that it is “in the field of staffing that the implications of services to genealogists are most likely to be felt” (1987, p. 190). Nevertheless, as a service offered in libraries, staff need to be competent in this area (Harvey, 1987, p. 190; Webster, 2005, p. 42).

- **Lack of professional/specialist staff**

Concern that the increased popularity of local studies services has not been reflected in investment was already being raised in the nineteen-eighties (Miller, 1984; Paul, 1988). More recently, budgetary constraints have led to local studies departments having no qualified staff on hand to deal with local studies enquiries (Barber, 2007; Holt, 1996). This issue is of particular concern given the almost universal opinion that local studies librarianship is a specialist field.

Reid (2003, p. 35) has compared the specialist nature of local studies work to business or legal librarianship and Smith (2002, p. 156) acknowledged the pitfalls of general library staff being expected to answer specialist queries. The lack of undergraduate and post graduate local studies modules on librarianship courses is cited as one reason for declining standards in service provision (Barber, 2007, p. 2). Nevertheless, as Bateman concluded, whether there are specialist staff to deliver the service or not, “if it is a service libraries provide, surely their staff should all be as informed about it as any other area” (2012, p. 14).

Dewe (2002, p. 6) highlighted the susceptibility of local studies departments to the general pressures that affect the public libraries within which they are housed and that, despite improvements in provision during the nineties, the “general health” of public libraries must improve in order for local studies services not to suffer setbacks.

### **2.2.2 History Centres**

As Dewe has repeatedly argued, (2002; 2003) given their specialist nature it seems “an historical accident” (2002, p. 175) that local history collections have been included in public libraries at all. Many support his view: Dansie (1987, p. 108-9 ) notes that many local studies librarians are quite separate from the library “chain of command” and naturally work more closely with archives and museums, and Ansell (1987, p. 48-9 ) observes the potential for an “improved and more integrated service to the public.” This integration complies with Gorman’s call for closer co-operation between libraries and other cultural



institutions, “pooling resources and harnessing energy and expertise to achieve common goals...” (2007, p. 488).

Greta Friggens (1998) emphasised the findings of her post graduate research that suggested history centres are “more organised, efficient and effective” (p. 8). She argued that “public expectation of quality services” and “continuing government control of local government expenditure” could be resolved in the wider adoption of local studies centres (p. 9). Similarly, Dewe concurred that: “...the local studies centre seems to be the future and the one which to me offers the most benefits to all parties, including users and local authorities (2003, p. 6). However, he conceded two disadvantages: first, the emphasis on preservation in a joint archive facility can “disadvantage” access; second, centralization is “particularly appropriate in urban authorities where distance may not be a great problem and public transport is readily available” (2002, p. 27). Local collections become far less “local” when they are removed to the other end of a large rural county.

While local studies centres may appear to be a solution to the challenges faced by public library local collections, Rimmer has argued that archives and local studies collections provide very different services. He concludes that local studies services are “best administered as part of library services” (1992, p. 14).

## ***Summary***

The debate has centred largely on the advantages and disadvantages of various locations for the local studies collection: local public library or centralised history centre. There is no literature which examines how these services co-exist, or what the remit of the public library is where there is a centralised collection.

### **2.2.3 Delivering the service- staff training**

The pressures on library staff have been cited as one of the major challenges of public library local studies provision (Barber, 2007; Holt, 1996; Miller, 1984; Paul, 1988; Reid, 2003). This section focuses on the current state of training, the difficulties involved in training library staff, and possible solutions.

## ***Guidelines and policies***

CILIP's "What Makes a Good Library Service" (2010) states that:

Staff should be helpful, knowledgeable, welcoming and well-trained. They should be involved in a workforce development programme. Staff in front line customer service roles should be supported by specialists in service planning and promotion, leadership and management, and those areas of service delivery requiring specialist skills and expertise.

In 2002 The Library Association produced a set of updated local studies guidelines for public libraries. The staffing section stated that:

Additional local studies staff should be provided in sufficient numbers to oversee public access to the collection effectively, to answer routine enquiries and to enable satisfactory standards in the acquisition, cataloguing and indexing of local studies items to be maintained (Martin, 2002, p. 50).

Importantly, the guidelines acknowledge that it is often frontline library assistants that are the first point of enquiry, and they should not be overlooked in the local studies training programme (Martin, 2002, p. 51).

Wiltshire's local studies policy statement makes the following points regarding staff and training:

Collections in public libraries will be locally managed and exploited by trained staff with the overview of the County Local Studies Librarian and with advice and support from Local Studies staff (Wiltshire Council, 2013, Para. 10).

The County Local Studies librarian shall be responsible for developing and delivering training in liaison with the Information Services Manager and Library Operations Manager (Wiltshire Council, 2013, Para. 17).

Guidelines for local studies provision highlight the importance of providing thorough and continuous training across all levels of staff in the public library.

### ***Challenges of training library staff***

The small amount of literature about staff training is concerned with general library work. However, general investigations into training methods and staff responses can be applied to the field of local studies provision.

- **Insufficient training budgets**

Cost has a major influence on the training a library service can provide. As Crumpton observed, "In good economic times the human resource function expands on staffing, employee involvement programs and training. In poor times these activities are the first to go in the cutbacks" (2011, p. 167). Rowley (1996, p. 31) argued that staff performance directly relates to the quality of

customer service which, in turn, influences the level of contribution that libraries make to their communities. It is evident, therefore, that staff training is an essential expense for library services and should not be seen as an unnecessary cost, but a vital investment (Holt, 1999, p. 80).

- **Training methods**

King, McMenemy and Poulter (2006) analysed the findings of a staff survey into the effectiveness of the national programme of European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) training. They acknowledged a concern from staff that the programme is a “How to” training system and does not teach you “how to think, problem solve etc.” suggesting “a weakness in using pre-existing training packages as core training competencies” (p. 272- 73). They concluded that the “emphasis needs to be placed in future training on developing a package based around the needs of front line staff rather than merely using an available package for economy’s sake” (p. 275). Such findings can be applied to any training for library staff, including enquiry techniques and local studies skills.

Recent discussion relating to staff training emphasised the effectiveness of in-house peer training in building skills and confidence amongst staff (Bateman, 2012; Crumpton, 2011; Holt, 1999; Paben and Fricke, 2011; Stec Dankert and Dempsey, 2002). Crumpton argued that: “In-house training programs are the most effective to the long term success of the organization’s strategic goals...” (2011, p. 172).

In the United States, De Paul University found peer training to be highly effective in improving the reference skills of its library staff (Stec Dankert &

Dempsey, 2002). More recently, Melbourne Library Services staff survey proved a useful tool for managers of the local history service in determining levels of staff knowledge and confidence (Bateman, 2012). This approach to designing and delivering training has resulted in a “more consistent level of service” (Bateman, 2012, p. 14).

Designing training around staff self-assessment has the advantage of involving the staff in their own professional development, and ensuring training is tailored to what is actually needed. Crumpton considered it a “good starting place for determining training needs” (2011, p. 168) and Holt agreed that “Simple informal surveys of staff...can bring training needs into the open” (1999, p. 83).

## **2.3 Summary**

There are arguments for formal, professional courses and in-house training programmes but before any kind of training programme can be agreed upon, it is necessary to define what the local studies collection of a public library is expected to deliver. This may become even more necessary where a centralised collection exist in the same authority.

There is a clear gap in the literature about how central collections and public library branches interact, and a lack of discussion with staff in the service about how well-trained they feel to fulfil the increasingly demanding task of local studies provision. Using Wiltshire as a case study, this research will examine the role of public libraries in local studies provision and the relationship with centralized collections. It will also assess staff skills and confidence in delivering local studies services, and identify training preferences.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Case study**

In order to address the issues adequately, it was decided that a case study of one local authority would be the most effective method. A wider investigation involving a number of different authorities would make it difficult to undertake an in-depth assessment of the issues raised in the literature review. The case study approach allows a deeper and more thorough examination of the research question (Bell 2010; Hammond and Wellington, 2013).

### **3.2 Methods**

A mixed methods approach was taken for data collection. This combines the benefits of quantitative and qualitative methodology to meet the research objectives. Bryman argues that although case studies have been primarily associated with qualitative research, they are “frequently sites for the employment of both quantitative and qualitative research” (2008, p. 53).

The literature review raised two main issues: whether a history centre or public library is the most appropriate setting for local studies materials; and the lack of staff expertise or appropriate local studies training.

In order to investigate the first issue, qualitative interviews with History Centre and public library managers were undertaken to gather the views of senior professional staff about the role of both environments in local studies provision and to investigate how the two services can co-operate.

The other main issue was the need for staff to have appropriate training to be able to fulfil service provision. Questionnaires were used to gather quantitative

and qualitative data from frontline staff regarding their skill level and confidence in delivering local studies services, as well as their thoughts on training methods.

As the literature review highlighted, no surveys have been undertaken in the UK to assess the training needs of public library staff in the delivery of local studies services, though similar survey-based approaches in Australia and the United States have proved successful tools for training design. This formed the basis for the survey of frontline staff in this case study.

### **3.2.1 Questionnaires**

A self-completion questionnaire was given to frontline library staff in Wiltshire libraries. The main reason for using the quantitative method of questionnaires was that the opinions of many people could be collected easily and quickly to provide a broad picture of current local studies provision, and the levels of confidence staff possess in the delivery of this service (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p. 138). Anonymous self-completion questionnaires were deemed the most effective method to encourage staff to give 'honest' responses and to avoid 'interviewer effects' (Bryman, 2008, p. 218).

A common problem associated with the self-administered questionnaire is a poor response rate (Bell, 2010; Brace, 2004; Bryman, 2008; Hammond & Wellington, 2013). However, it was anticipated that the survey would achieve a relatively high response rate as it was carried out within the researcher's own authority and it was clearly stated that the research may be used to assist the design of local studies training courses within Wiltshire

## **Questions**

The questionnaire ‘tested’ knowledge of available resources across the county and the confidence of staff in using those resources. The questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions. Of these, thirteen were closed questions, that is, participants could choose from a fixed number of responses. Although Bryman (2008, p. 237) points out, “it is difficult to make forced-choice answers exhaustive”, he acknowledges that they make the questionnaire quick and easy to fill out and “enhance the comparability of answers” (2008, p. 235). To minimise the disadvantages of closed questions offering insufficient options to participants, an ‘other’ option was provided where possible. Where this was offered, participants were given limited space to specify their alternative.

An ‘additional comments’ section was included as the last question. This was considered to be important as there would be numerous reasons for differences in staff skill levels. This question also allowed the questionnaire to collect ideas about training programmes from the staff.

Semantic differential five-point scales were used in five of the questions. Rating scales were considered most appropriate for attitudinal questions as they “provide a straightforward way of asking attitudinal information that is easy and versatile to analyse” (Brace, 2004, p. 79). Various forms of rating scale were considered. Due to the varied reasons for people’s enjoyment of and competence in local studies work, it was considered that there were too many possible options to phrase a fixed statement for respondents to agree or disagree with. It was also feared that a ‘neither agree nor disagree’ option would contribute to a lack of data. For these reasons the Likert scale, though



popular in self-administered surveys (Bryman, 2008, p. 46), was deemed unsuitable. Instead a five-point semantic differential scale- a bipolar scale in which opposite statements are placed at the two ends of the scale and respondents indicate their level of agreement by marking a number along the scale- was chosen allowing people to express their level of enjoyment, ability or confidence without having to agree or disagree with a fixed statement. It also meant that each number on the scale had value, so if someone went through selecting 3 each time, it had more meaning than 'neither agree/nor disagree'. Another advantage of this type of scale is that the points are not semantically identified, therefore "bias towards agreeing with a statement is avoided, as both ends of the scale have to be considered" (Brace, 2004, p. 89).

The questions used were based around key points that had been highlighted in a similar staff survey which took place in Melbourne Library Service in 2012. The Melbourne survey was undertaken to discover staff knowledge and interest in local studies services and aimed to discover:

- *How they felt about local history*
- *The local history skill level of individual staff*
- *The perceived importance of local history training*

(Bateman, 2012, p. 14)

These points were used to shape the layout of this questionnaire.

### ***Layout and design***

The questionnaire was divided into three sections, with the headings clearly displayed in bold type. Bell (2010, p. 149) advises that the questionnaire should start with “straightforward, easy-to-complete questions and move on to the more complex topics.” As a result, the first section consisted of only three questions, titled ‘About you’. The first question ascertained the job title of the participant. This was in order to discover any relationship between job grade and responses. The other questions ascertained the participant’s perceived importance of local studies to their job, and their enjoyment of local studies work.

The second section, ‘library resources’, was similarly straightforward, and required participants to tick from a list which resources they were aware of. All possible answers were listed as it was designed to ‘test’ levels of awareness of local studies services. The closed question format with tick-box responses was considered the most appropriate over open test questions as they are less intimidating to the participant, and make the results more easily comparable for the researcher. It was necessary to distinguish between lack of awareness of an existing resource, and lack of provision of a resource, so a ‘not applicable’ option was available for each resource to accommodate staff from smaller libraries with fewer resources.

In the final section, ‘skills and training’, participants were asked to grade their confidence in providing a series of local studies services listed in a table. This section was placed at the end of the questionnaire as participants would have had a chance to assess their own awareness against the previous questions

and would more accurately be able to assess their confidence levels. Finally participants were questioned on their training received so far and their attitudes to various methods of training.

### ***Piloting and sample***

Bell (2010, p. 151) advises that:

All data-gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes recipients to complete them, to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable you to remove any items which do not yield useable data.

The questionnaire was piloted during a staff meeting so that feedback could be collected and queries answered. Following the results of the first pilot, changes were made to some of the questions that had been highlighted by respondents. Question One posed the greatest problem, with 54% of respondents (n=13) not knowing what level their library was. As this was likely to be representative of the respondents across the county, this question was removed altogether. In Wiltshire Library Service similar sized libraries are grouped into one of seven levels. Libraries in a group will have similar issues, size of stock, membership, opening hours and number of visitors. A wide variation in services and skills was expected depending largely on the size and location of the library, so it was necessary to be able to place the results in the context of library levels to make the results more meaningful. Therefore, a different method of obtaining this information was found, and the surveys were sent out in batches to individual libraries with the level pre-printed on the survey.

Mobile libraries (level one) and volunteer-run libraries (level two) were not included as they have no local studies stock. Levels three to seven participated in the survey- level seven being the largest.

The remaining queries were concerned with ambiguity of wording in some of the questions. Most of these issues were easily rectified by the clarification of terms and slight re-wording to give clearer instructions on what was being asked. Not all questions that had produced queries were altered, usually because the respondent had not read the question properly, or it was felt that the question couldn't be phrased any more clearly.

In order to improve the quality of the pilot sample, a wider range of staff were included in a second pilot. This was undertaken a week later with six of the participants from the first sample, and an additional four members of staff from two branch libraries without local studies departments, or sizable collections. Three Saturday Assistants were also given the second pilot questionnaire. These results produced fewer queries. Those respondents who were completing the questionnaire for the second time commented that the questionnaire was very clear, while the respondents at the smaller branch libraries found the questions easy to understand and answer.

### ***Implementation***

Once the questions had been piloted and finalised, a copy of the questionnaire and an explanatory cover note were sent to the Head of Service to be approved. Although a cover note was supplied with each questionnaire, it was

agreed that an advance e-mail would also be sent to local branch managers explaining in more detail the purpose of the research and the administration of the questionnaire.

A period of two weeks was agreed for the completion of questionnaires, to ensure as many staff as possible were able to complete them. A reminder e-mail was sent out at the end of the two week period.

### **3.2.2 Interviews**

Qualitative face-to-face interviews were chosen in order to fulfil the research objective of ascertaining managers' perceptions of a public library's role in local studies provision and to discuss the impact of the History Centre. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that, while the interview covered the areas relevant to the research question, interviewees had "a great deal of leeway" to express their own point of view and concerns (Bryman, 2008, p. 438). The informal structure also allowed for interviewer response and probing where necessary (Bryman, 2008, p. 447). A focus group style of interview was considered to gain a variety of managerial views although this would have been more difficult to organise. Mainly this method of data collection was dismissed as individuals may have been reluctant to express opinions in a group situation, and the breadth of discussion may have been narrowed by more vocal members of a group.

## ***Design***

The interview questions were divided into two sections: the first section related to the role of public libraries in local studies provision; the second section related to staff training issues. The first question established the interviewees' opinion on the importance of local studies provision in a public library setting. This related to the general research aim and set the overall context of the discussion. Subsequent questions related to the various issues that had arisen in the literature review. Interviewees were encouraged to explore the advantages and disadvantages of public library provision compared with centralised collections, and to consider how the two types of organisation work together. Having established the level of service which ought to be provided, questions next sought to discover the interviewees' opinions on how the service should be delivered, largely focussing on staff training. This structure broadly resembled that identified by Charmaz (2002) in Bryman (2008, p. 447-8), in which she identified three kinds of questions: "initial open-ended questions"; "intermediate questions" which seek more detailed responses and justification for opinions; finally, "ending questions" which might explore how things could be done differently and ways of moving forward.

The questions were used as prompts only and to allow the interviewees to prepare for topics that would be discussed. The wording and question order was altered as necessary throughout the interview in reaction to the interviewees' responses and in order to maintain a conversational tone. The interview schedule is attached in the appendix.

### ***Pilot***

Due to time constraints and the limited number of interviewees it was decided not to conduct a pilot interview. In view of this, several measures were taken to minimise potential issues that might have been raised by a pilot. Interviewees were sent the interview schedule, information about the study and the conduct of the interview, and a consent form a week in advance of the interview date. It was made clear that the interview schedule was a guide only and that interviewees were free to elaborate and digress if they felt it necessary or relevant to the research topic.

### ***Sample***

Three interviews were conducted with senior members of staff from both the library service and the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. They were chosen for their specialist knowledge of the area of research, or for their area of responsibility. The interviewees included the Archives Manager of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, also Chair of the CILIP Local Studies Group; a member of the library management team with responsibility for staff training; and a specialist Local Studies Librarian.

### ***Interviewing***

The conduct of the interviews, both in the preliminary stages and during, followed the advice of Bell (2010, p. 170-1).

Interviewees were initially contacted by e-mail with a brief introduction of the research project and its aims. At this stage they were simply asked if they would be prepared to take part in a short interview. Once the interviewee had

agreed in principle to participate, a more detailed e-mail was sent with an interview information sheet, a consent form, and an interview schedule.

Interviews were recorded using a smartphone and brief notes were also taken in case of technical problems. The interviews were then transcribed to ensure accurate representation of the interviewees' answers, and to allow for detailed analysis (Bryman, 2008, p. 443).

### **3.3 Methods of data analysis**

Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were used to organise responses from the questionnaires. Questionnaires were divided into groups according to library levels, using a separate spreadsheet for each level. Each questionnaire was then numbered 1-84. Data was then transferred to the corresponding level spreadsheet. Totals for each response were calculated in tables and translated into excel bar or pie charts. Results were displayed in visual charts for easy comparison between library levels, and between different job grades. Responses were also combined to give overall statistics for the service as a whole. Responses to open questions were typed into a Word document under the headings of library level and job title so that they could be more easily accessed and analysed. Themes were identified in the open ended responses and responses were coded according to these.

Interviews were transcribed and coded by theme. An example containing part of a transcript is included in Appendix Three.



### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The use of a named authority as a case study in this research required high ethical standards to be upheld. Permission to use Wiltshire as a case study was obtained from the Head of the Library Service and the collection and use of data was conducted in line with the guidelines produced by the university's Ethics Department.

The survey was checked and approved by the Head of Service before distribution, and the introductory paragraph on each questionnaire informed participants that the questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary. It also stated the purpose of the research and how the data collected would be used. It was stated that by returning a completed questionnaire, the respondent had agreed to participate in the survey.

Interviewees were sent information about the research project, a rough interview schedule and a consent form to sign in advance of the interviews taking place. Consent forms are attached in Appendix 4.

### **3.5 Limitations**

#### ***General***

Some major concerns about the use of case studies, in particular the difficulty of generalising results to a wider context, are summarised by Bell (2010, p. 9) and Bryman (2008, p. 55). However, it was considered the most appropriate method for this research project on two grounds: it allows an in-depth

examination of complex issues; and it suits the small-scale nature of the research and the limited time-frame and resources.

It is not expected that the data collected from this survey will apply generally to other public library services. Bell (2010, p. 9) cites Bassey's 1981 paper that argues the merits of "reliability" rather than "generalizability". It is hoped that a deeper examination of current issues regarding local studies provision in this study will be 'reliable' to other authorities where both public libraries and centralised collections co-exist.

Although the questionnaires and interview structure have been designed as objectively as possible, the researcher has worked within Wiltshire Library Service for five years. In the staff surveys this posed less of a problem as the anonymity of participants was paramount. However, the researcher knew two of the three interviewees prior to the interviews taking place. As a result extra care was taken to ensure the accuracy of the responses.

### ***Instrumentation***

Initially an electronic survey had been the preferred method of distribution due to advantages such as quicker completion, better design and layout, and the inability of respondents to be able to look ahead when the sequence of questions may have been designed in a particular way (Brace, 2004, p. 40). Unfortunately, local ICT issues have caused problems with web-based surveys in the past so it was decided that paper questionnaires would be the most suitable option.

## ***Analysis***

Data was analysed by library level and by job title in order to identify any correlations with levels of skills and confidence.

Semantic differential rating scales were chosen over the Likert scale for attitudinal questions so as not to force respondents to express an exact statement that they may not have agreed with. While the lack of semantically identifying points on the scale may be an advantage in eliminating bias towards agreement, it does allow the respondent to interpret what the un-named points on the scale represent, and this may differ between respondents, so that someone who feels fairly confident in delivering a particular service can circle '4' on a five-point scale, where someone else who feels as confident may circle '3'. This can produce problems in the analysis of results.

One of the major problems with analysis was that some respondents had misunderstood what was meant by a particular resource. Although the type of resource was always clearly described in the question e.g. census *on fiche*, *historic* maps, some respondents had included modern ordnance survey maps, or census returns on *Ancestry.com*. Where it was considered this had been the case, it was clearly highlighted in the description of the findings and these were not taken into account of the analysis as they would have skewed the results.

In the initial design of the questionnaire, a 'don't know' option had been considered for some of the questions. This was not included in the final design as it was decided that there was a danger of respondents too readily 'opting out' of trying to answer the question. Brace acknowledges this as a common problem where 'don't know' options are routinely added and that there is a

“consequent increase in lost data” (2004, p. 161). However, this meant that some respondents, particularly from smaller libraries had just left questions blank. It was not always certain, therefore, whether the respondent didn’t know the answer, didn’t understand the question, or had just overlooked the question.

### **3.6 Methods summary**

The case study design was considered on balance to be the most effective method of investigating the research question. Although this meant that the findings were less likely to be transferrable to a wider context, it allowed for detailed analysis of the issues raised in the literature review. The smaller-scale nature of the case study approach also allowed for a variety of methods to be used in data collection which enabled a detailed analysis of meaningful results. A questionnaire of mostly quantitative data but with some scope for open questions worked relatively well as a test for fulfilling the first three objectives of the research although, with hindsight, clearer description of the resources was necessary to reduce confusion amongst respondents and labelling the individual points on the five-point rating scale questions would potentially have produced clearer results.

Interviews with a selected sample of senior managers enhanced the largely quantitative data from the questionnaires and fulfilled the fourth objective of the research. The semi-structured nature of the interviews worked well and many interesting and useful comments raised issues not previously considered. It would have been beneficial to add a fourth interviewee such as a Community

Librarian to the list of interviewees as they are managers working alongside frontline staff in public library branches and may have had some useful insights into how the 'bigger picture' of the senior management team is or isn't being adopted in practice on a daily basis.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The results are presented in relation to the objectives set out in Chapter One. The first section focuses on the data collected from the questionnaires and fulfils the first three objectives:

- 1) To assess the current level of local studies resources and services provided in public library branches.
- 2) To assess the level of skills and confidence of local branch staff in using a range of resources to answer local studies enquiries.
- 3) To identify potential training needs.

The second section focuses on the interviews and fulfils the fourth objective:

- 4) Assess library managers' perceptions of the role of the public library in providing local studies services where a centralised collection also exists.

Analysis and discussion of the findings will follow in the Analysis chapter.

### **4.2 Response rates and sample description**

The total number of questionnaires sent was 126. The overall response rate was 67%. Mangione's 1995 model (Bryman, 2008, p. 219) rates this as an acceptable response rate (figure 2). A breakdown of response rates by level can be seen in Figure 1. The highest response rate was from Level 6 libraries

(86%), and the lowest was from Level 3 libraries (38%). The low response rate from Level 3 libraries may be due to the lack of a Supervisor or Librarian in these branches to oversee dissemination and completion of the questionnaire. Another explanation is that Level 3 libraries, being the smallest, are often single-manned and therefore the staff had less opportunity to complete the questionnaire.

**Figure 1** Response rates by level and overall.

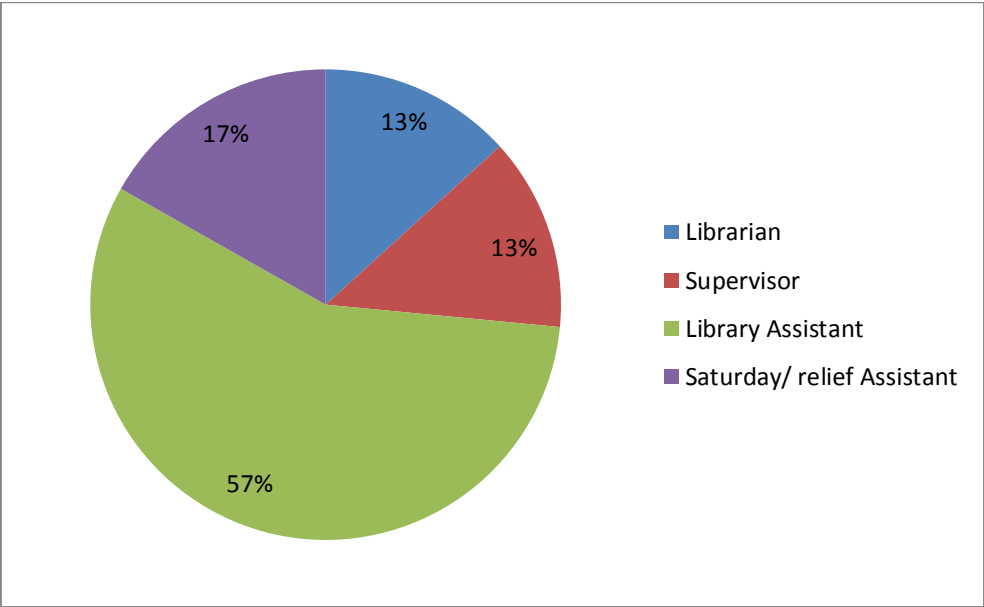
| <b>Level</b> | <b>Number sent</b> | <b>Number responses</b> | <b>Response rate (%)</b> |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>3</b>     | 16                 | 6                       | 38                       |
| <b>4</b>     | 25                 | 15                      | 60                       |
| <b>5</b>     | 22                 | 17                      | 77                       |
| <b>6</b>     | 14                 | 12                      | 86                       |
| <b>7</b>     | 49                 | 34                      | 69                       |
| <b>All</b>   | <b>126</b>         | <b>84</b>               | <b>67</b>                |

**Figure 2** Mangione's classification of bands of response rate

|           |                   |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Over 85%  | Excellent         |
| 70-85%    | Very good         |
| 60-69%    | Acceptable        |
| 50-59%    | Barely acceptable |
| Below 50% | Not acceptable    |

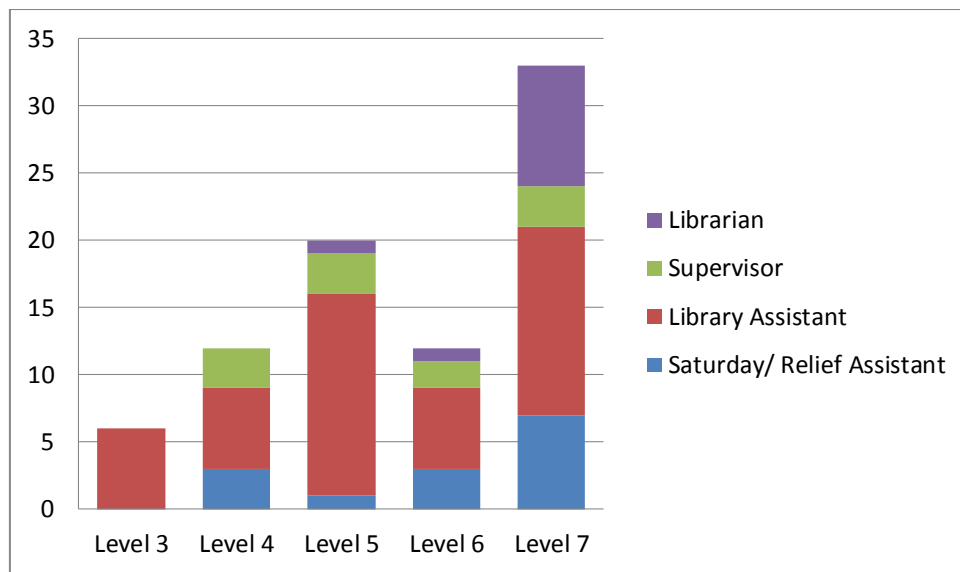
### Sample description

The sample included all Librarians, Supervisors and Library Assistants. The proportions of staff in these roles in the service as a whole were reflected in the survey responses (figure 3). The proportions of different staff across the library levels can be seen in figure 4.



**Figure 3** Job titles of respondents (%)





**Figure 4** Job titles of respondents by library level

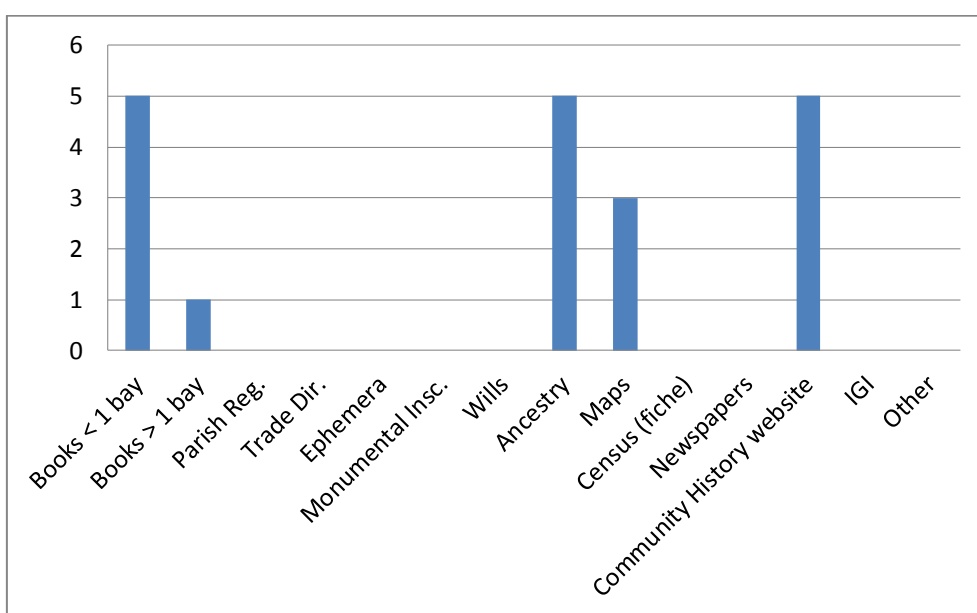
### 4.3 Findings: Questionnaires

#### *Objective One*

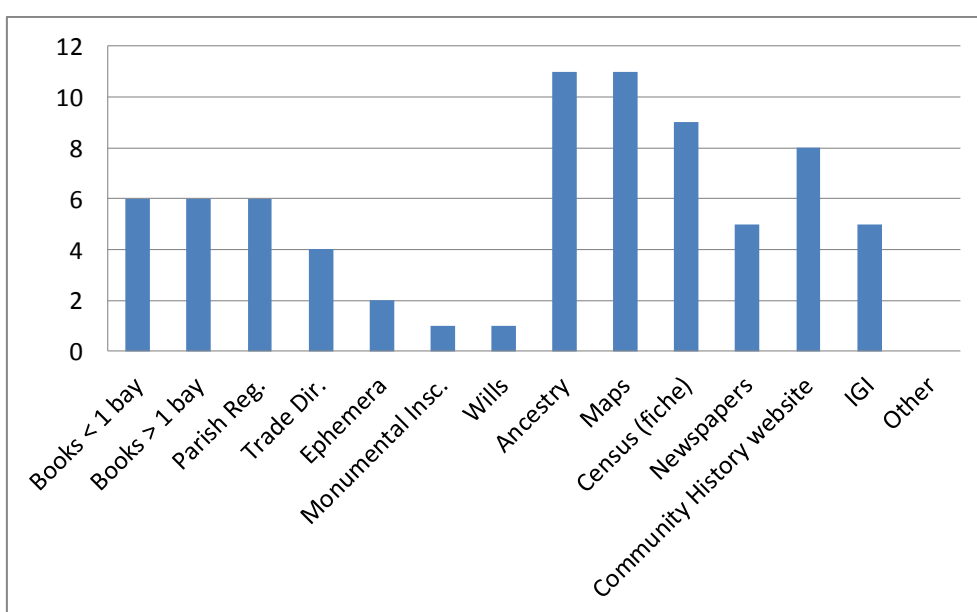
Objective One was to assess the current level of local studies resources and services provided in public library branches. Questions 4, 5 and 6 of the staff survey determined the current level of provision in public library branches, the frequency of local studies enquires and the most common enquiries received.

#### Question 4: What local studies resources are you aware your library provides?

Respondents were provided with a list of resources and asked to tick all those they were aware their library offered. In the Analysis chapter, these results are compared to the provision guidelines stated in the local studies policy as the staff survey will reflect staff awareness of resources, not necessarily an accurate inventory of actual stock holdings. The results are presented by library level in a series of bar charts (figures 5 – 9).



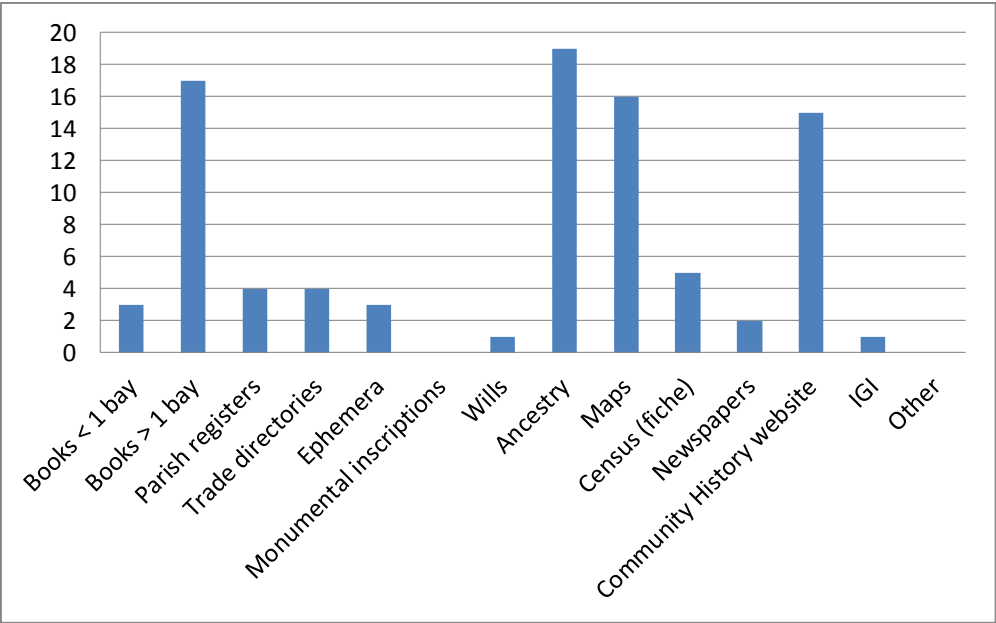
**Figure 5** Awareness of resources in home library (level 3)



**Figure 6** Awareness of resources in home library (level 4)

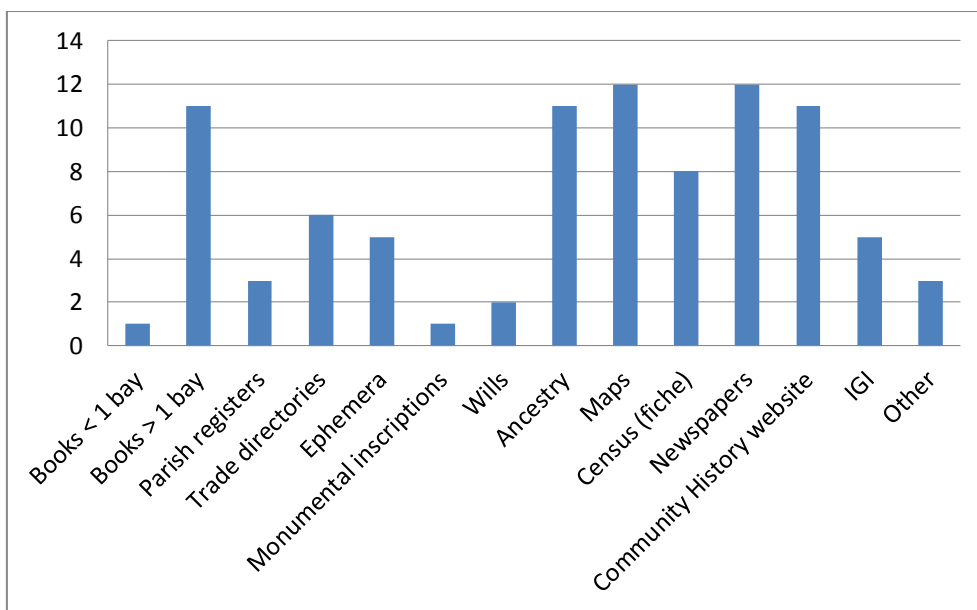
The results for the smaller level 3 and 4 libraries (figures 5 and 6) highlight some discrepancies between local studies material held. 50% of level 4 libraries have less than one bay of local studies book stock, the other 50% have more than one bay; 50% have some parish registers; some level three

and four libraries have ephemera collections, trade directories, local newspapers etc.

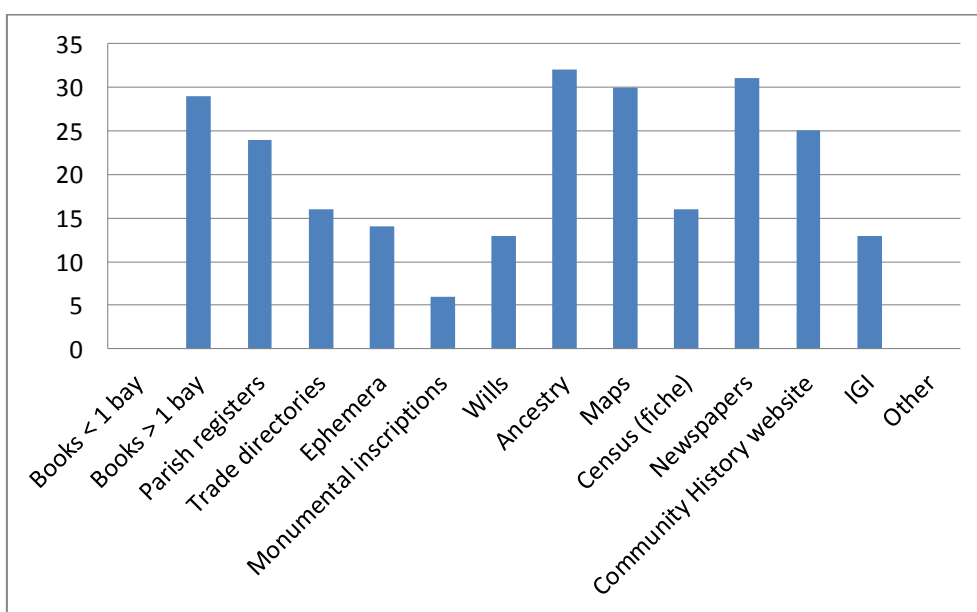


**Figure 7** Awareness of resources in home library (level 5)

Level 5 libraries (figure 7) are more consistent in their stock provision. Nearly all (85%) respondents stated that their libraries had more than one bay of local studies book stock and most (80%) had some maps. There is a good awareness of Ancestry Library Edition with all but one respondent aware of its existence.



**Figure 8** Awareness of resources in home library (level 6)



**Figure 9** Awareness of resources in home library (level 7)

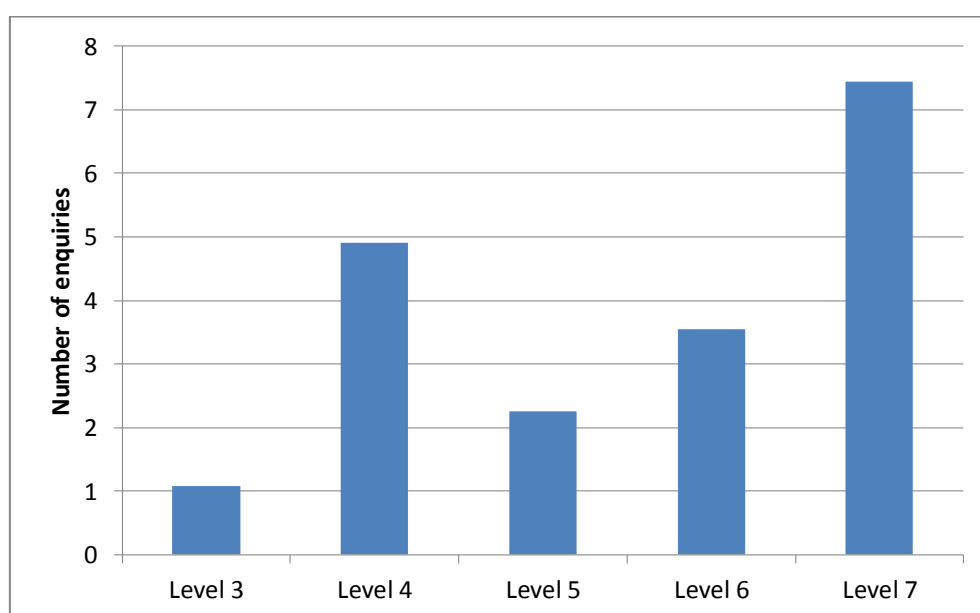
Level 6 and 7 libraries have a greater range of resources (figures 8 and 9). Nearly all have more than one bay of local studies book stock and in level 7 libraries most staff are aware of parish registers (83%), maps (86%) and

newspapers (89%) in their collections. There is a greater awareness of online resources such as Ancestry (91%) and the Community History website (71%).

The results show that there is a clear ‘tiered’ structure of provision that correlates with the level of library.

Question 5: Roughly how many local studies enquiries do you receive?

Participants were asked to state roughly how many local studies enquiries they received over the course of a day, week or month. The responses were standardised to show the average number of enquires per week for each level. Generally, larger libraries with more resources receive the most enquiries (figure 10). However, the results indicate that Level 4 libraries receive an above average number of enquires.

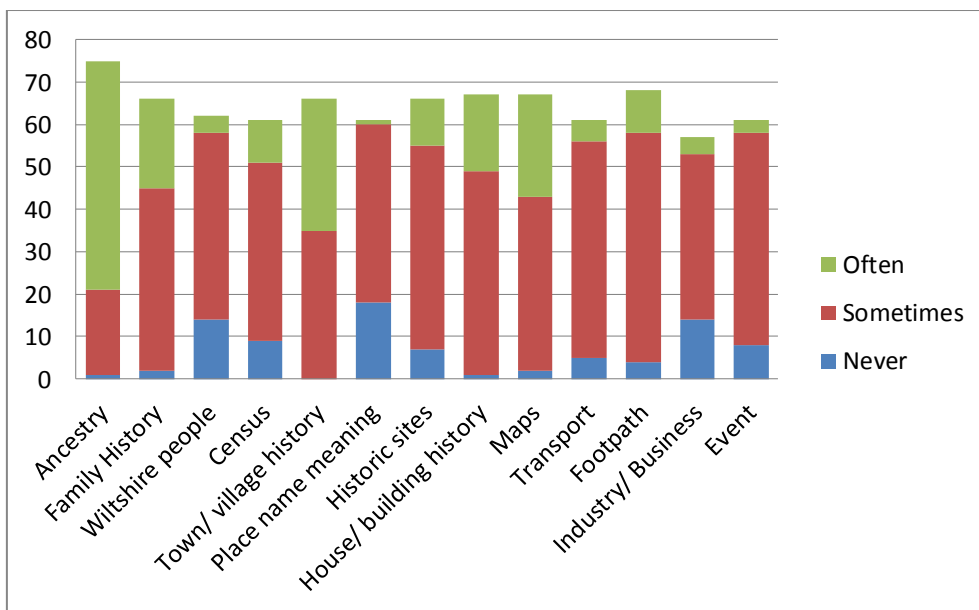


**Figure 10** Average number of enquiries per week

Question 6: What are your most common local studies enquiries?

The following charts show the frequency with which different types of local studies enquiries occur in each level of library. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they received enquiries on a list of topics and resources often, sometimes, or never.

Figure 11 shows a breakdown of each subject of enquiry and the stacked columns illustrate how frequently enquiries are received. It is clear that *Ancestry Library Edition* is the most commonly used resource in public branches with 63% of respondents stating that they are often asked for this service. The figure rises to 86% including enquiries received sometimes. Town or village history is also a popular enquiry, with all respondents who answered this question (75%) stating that they are sometimes or often asked for information relating to their local area. Between 74% and 75% of respondents receive family history enquiries, map enquiries, and house or building history enquiries sometimes or often.



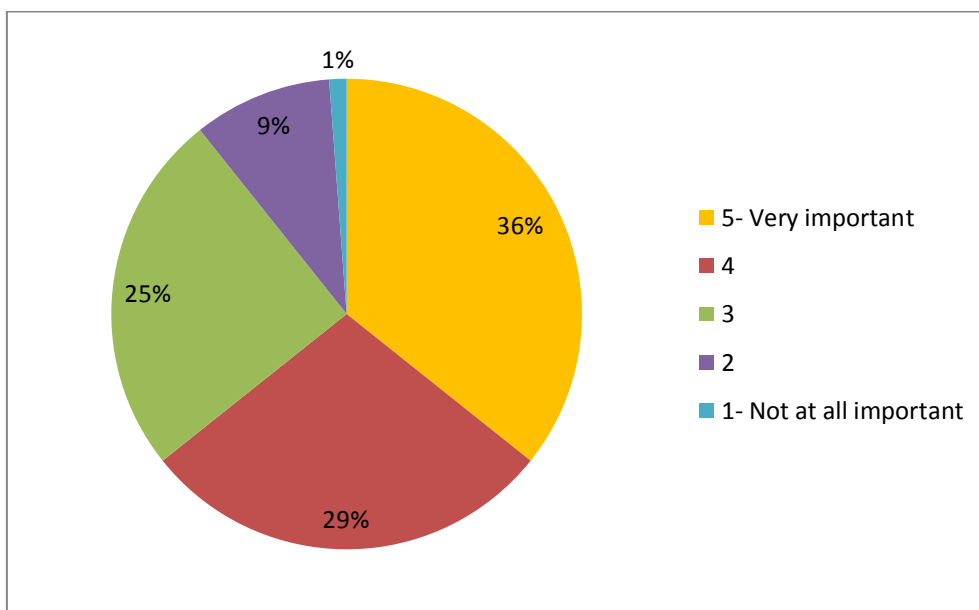
**Figure 11** Frequency of types of enquiries

## ***Objective Two***

Objective Two assessed the levels of skills and confidence of public library staff in using local studies resources and to identify training needs. This objective was measured using the staff survey. Questions 2 and 3a explored staff attitudes to local studies work; questions 7, 8 and 9 assessed staff awareness of services; questions 10 and 11 measured staff skills and confidence.

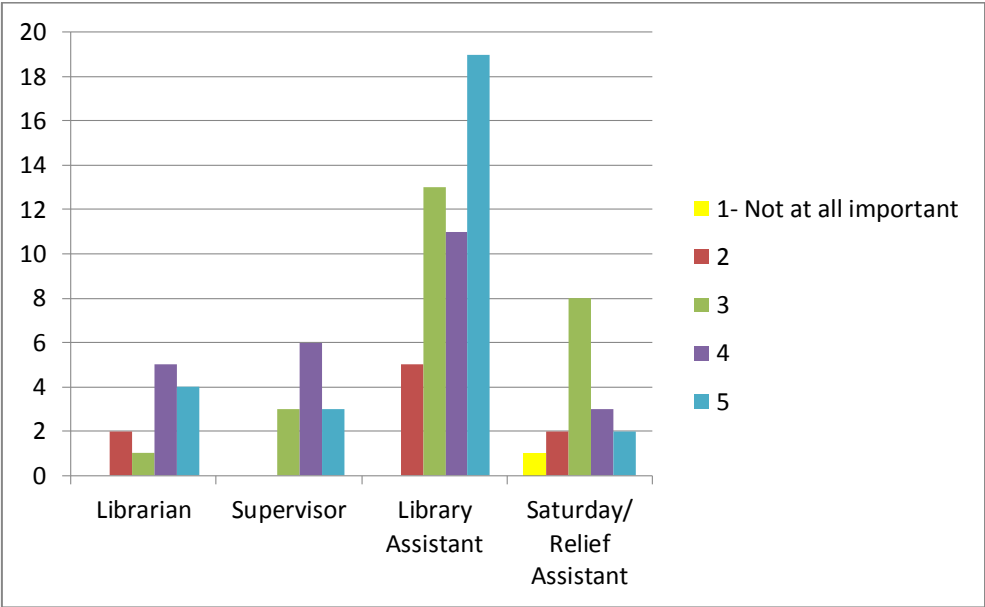
### ***Staff attitudes to Local Studies***

Figure 12 shows that the majority of staff considered local studies enquiry skills to be important to their job with 65% scoring 4 or 5 on a five point rating scale. Only 1% of respondents considered local studies skills to be not at all important.



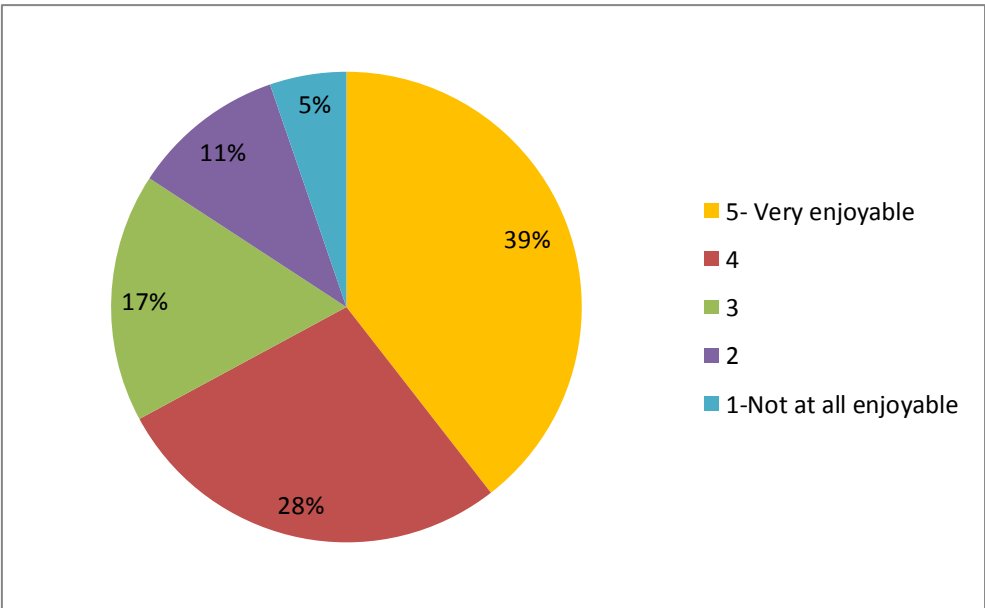
**Figure 12** Importance of local studies skills to job- overall

Figure 13 illustrates that for Librarians, Supervisors and Library Assistants, there is little correspondence between job title and how important staff feel local studies skills are to their jobs.



**Figure 13** Importance of local studies skills to job- by job title

Question 3a: To what extent do you find local studies work enjoyable?





**Figure 14** Level of staff enjoyment in local studies work

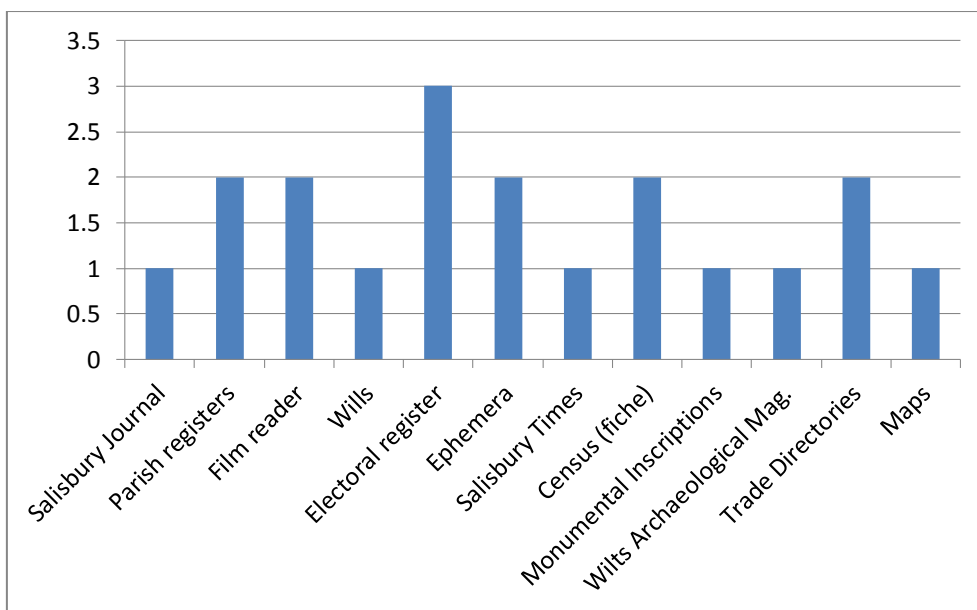
Most staff (67%) gave a high score of 4 or 5 on a five-point rating scale and enjoy dealing with local studies enquiries.

*Staff awareness of services*

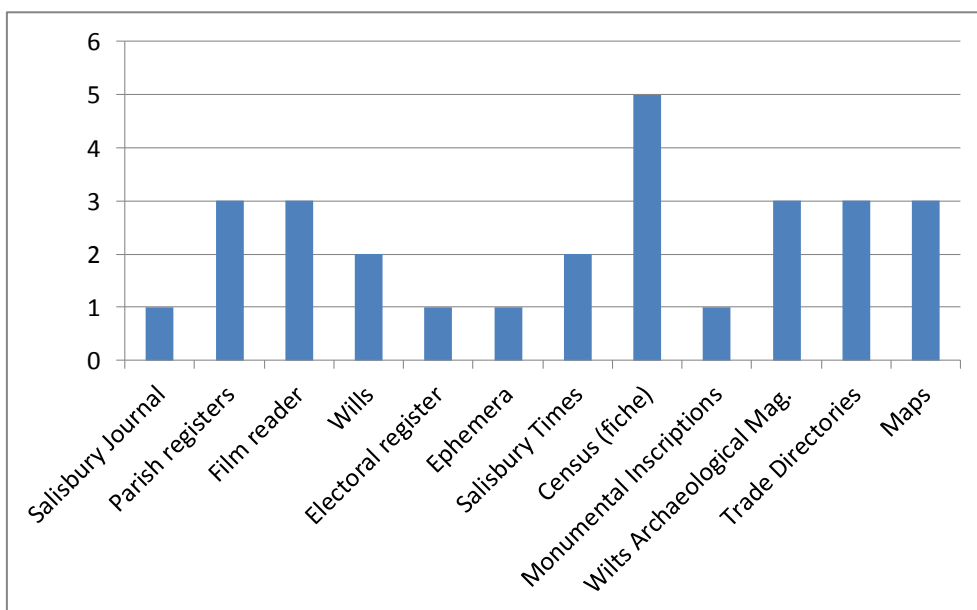
Participants were given a list of resources held at Salisbury Local Studies Department and were asked to tick all that they were aware of. Results are shown by library level in the following charts (figures 15-19).

Question 7: Which of these resources at Salisbury Local Studies Library are you aware of?

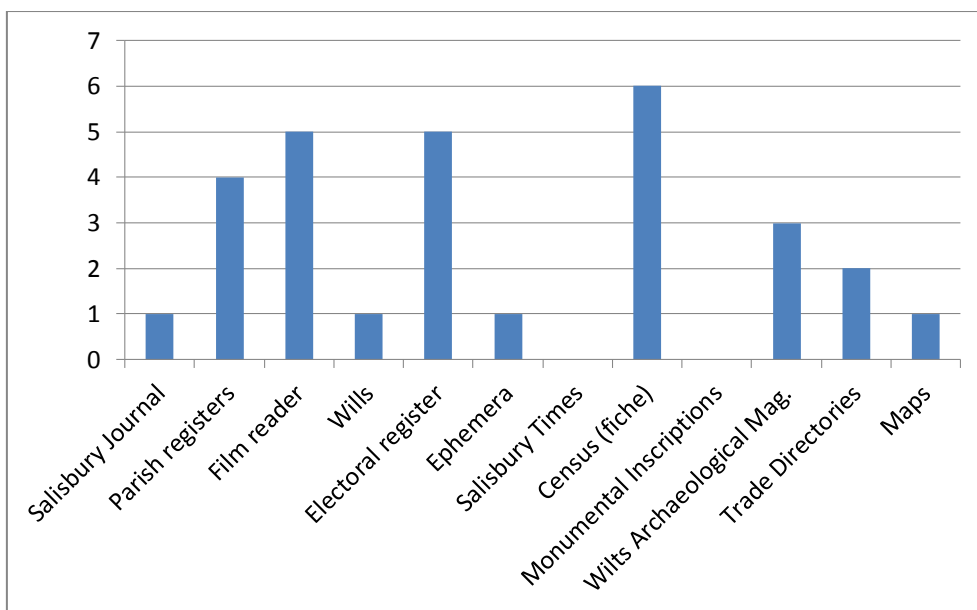
Awareness of resources held in the Salisbury Local Studies Library is relatively low across the service. Of the staff in level 3- 6 libraries (figures 15-18), only 10% were aware of the Salisbury Journal archive, 28% were aware of the parish register collection for the south of the county and 18% were aware of the map collection.



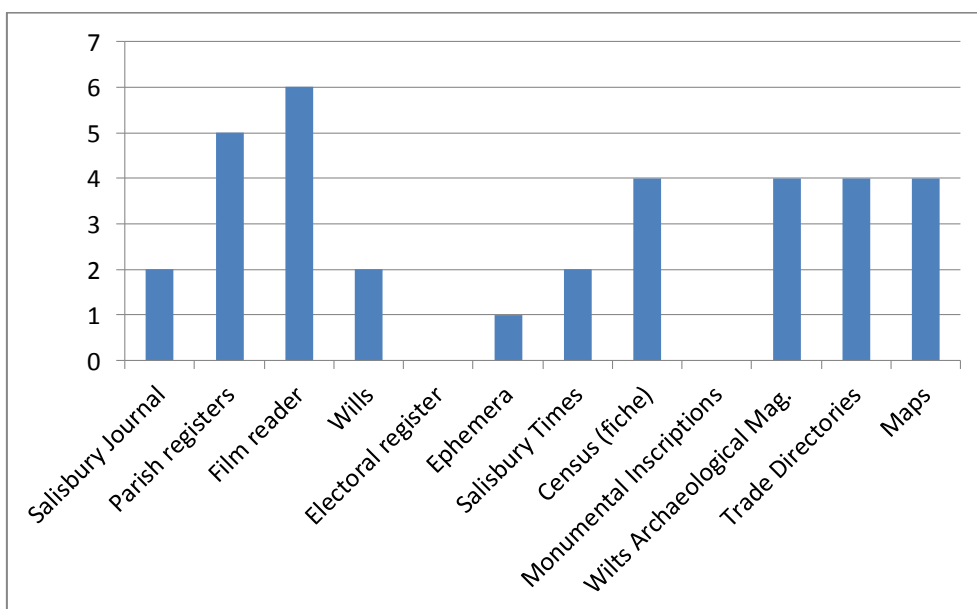
**Figure 15** Awareness of resources at Salisbury (level 3 libraries)



**Figure 16** Awareness of resources at Salisbury (level 4 libraries)



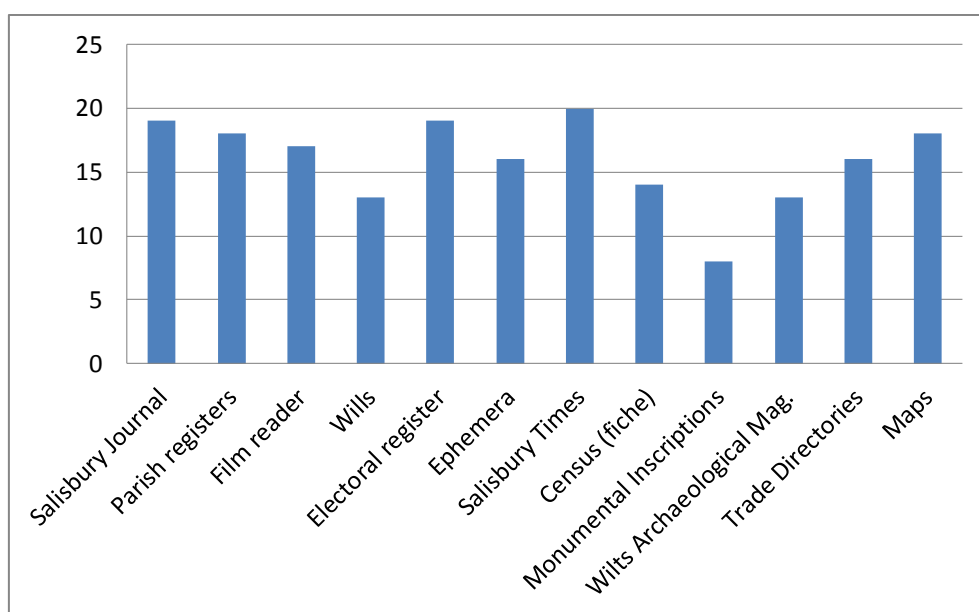
**Figure 17** Awareness of resources at Salisbury (level 5 libraries)



**Figure 18** Awareness of resources at Salisbury (level 6 libraries)

Level seven libraries (figure 19) show greater awareness because these results include staff working in Salisbury Library. 56% were aware of the *Journal*

archive, 53% of the parish registers collection and map collection. 47% were aware of the trade directories and the ephemera collection.

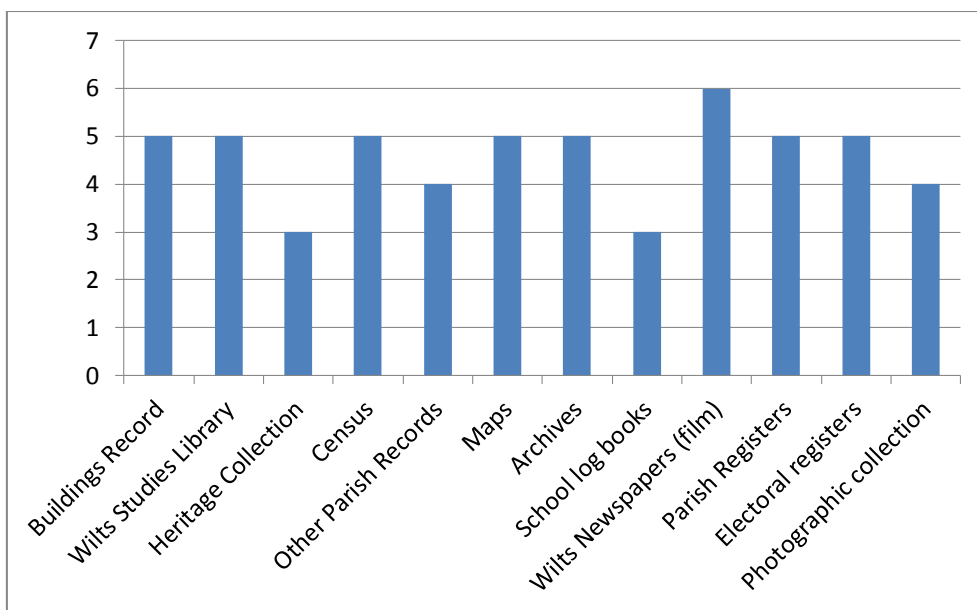


**Figure 19** Awareness of resources at Salisbury (level 7 libraries)

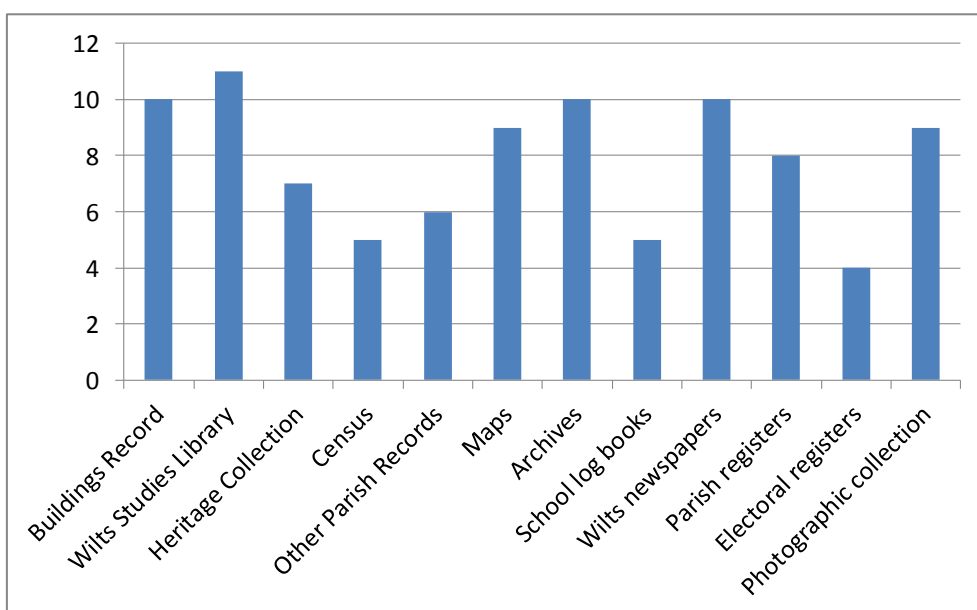
Question 8: Which of these History Centre services/resources are you aware of?

Participants were asked to select from a list all resources and services at the History Centre of which they were aware. Results are shown by library level (figures 20-24).

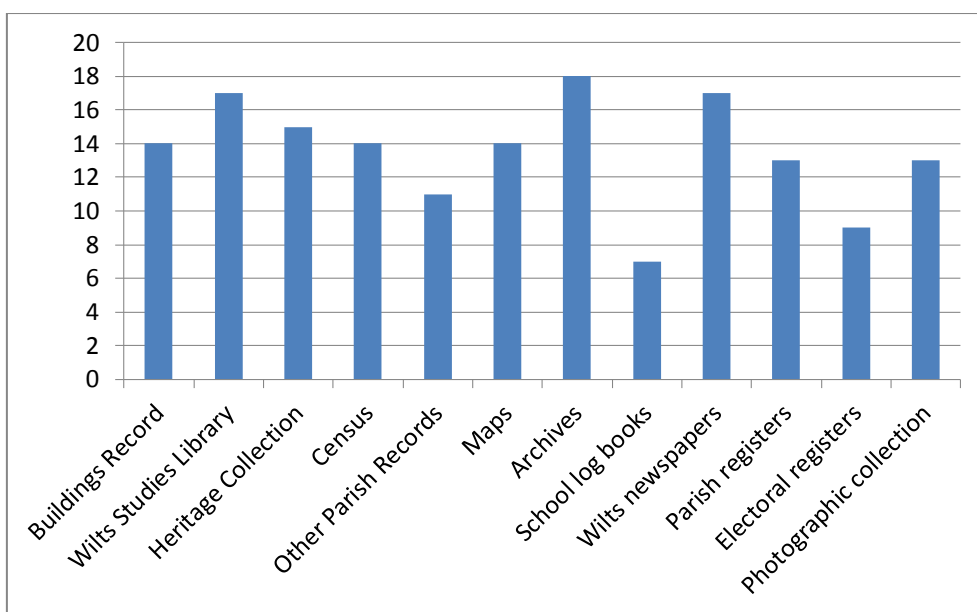
There is a good general awareness of resources held at the History Centre across the level 3-5 branches (figures 20-22). There was a high awareness of Buildings Record (76%), Wiltshire Local Studies Library (87%) and Archives (87%).



**Figure 20** Awareness of resources at History Centre (level 3 libraries)

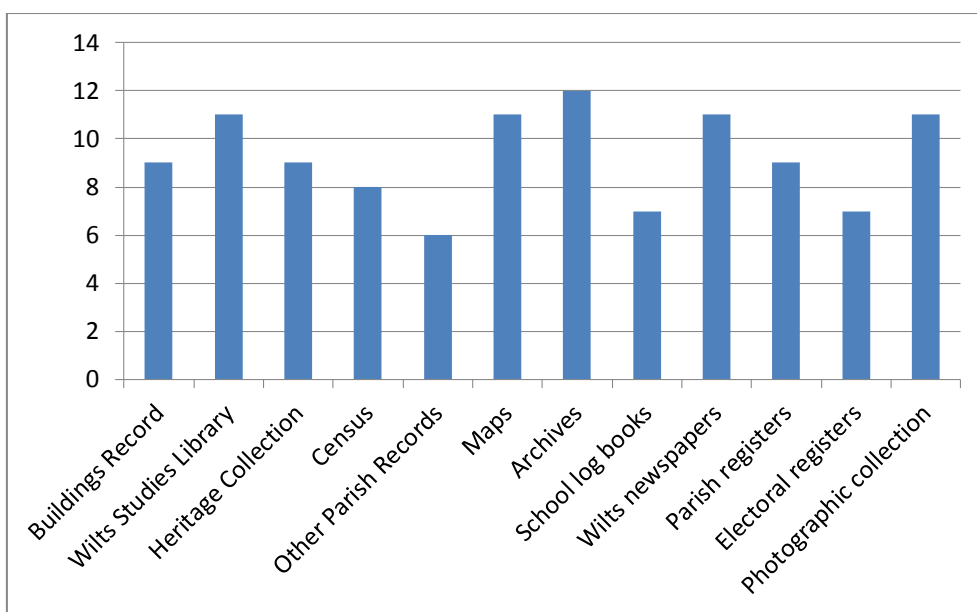


**Figure 21** Awareness of resources at History Centre (level 4 libraries)

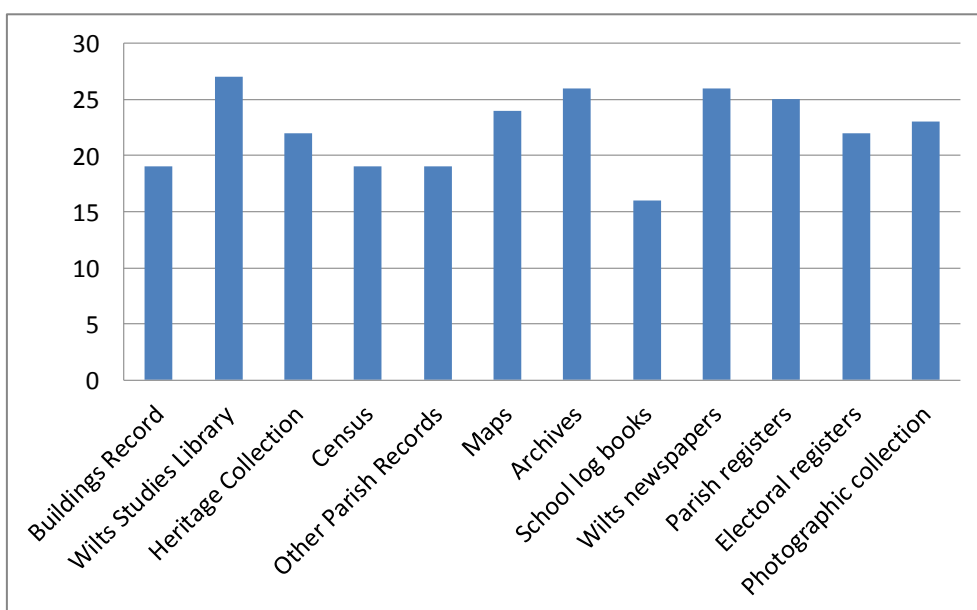


**Figure 22** Awareness of resources at History Centre (level 5 libraries)

Staff in Level 6 and 7 libraries showed similar awareness of the collections at the History Centre (figures 23 and 24). Wiltshire Studies Library (83%) and Archives (83%) were roughly the same as in the smaller branches. Buildings Record (61%) was slightly lower. Most staff were aware of other major collections such as maps (76%), newspaper archives (80%) and the photograph collection (74%).



**Figure 23** Awareness of resources at History Centre (level 6 libraries)



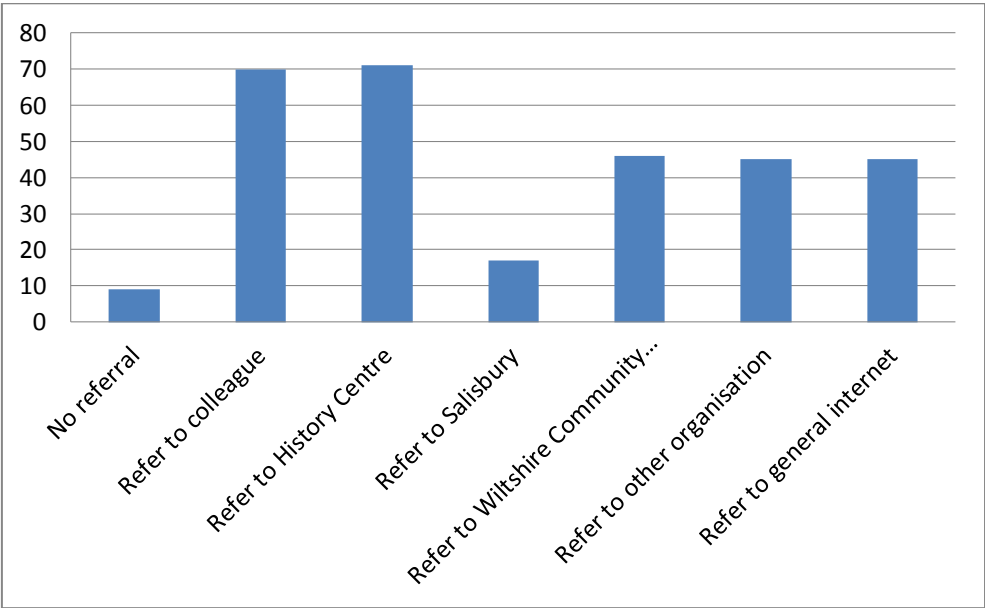
**Figure 24** Awareness of resources at History Centre (level 7 libraries)

There was little difference in levels of knowledge of resources at the History Centre among library staff working in different level libraries. Most respondents were aware of the major collections and most commonly used resources,

though there were still some respondents who were not aware of important resources.

Qn 9: If you have been unable to fully answer a local studies query in the past, what action have you taken?

This question sought to assess the referral skills of staff and their awareness of services offered at different locations or sources. Staff were asked to select from a list of options to which services they had referred customers in the past if they had been unable to answer the query themselves.



**Figure 25** Local studies enquiries referrals

Figure 25 illustrates that only 11% of respondents had made no referral at all if they had been unable to help. The majority of respondents had referred customers either to a colleague in their own library (83%) or to the History Centre (85%).

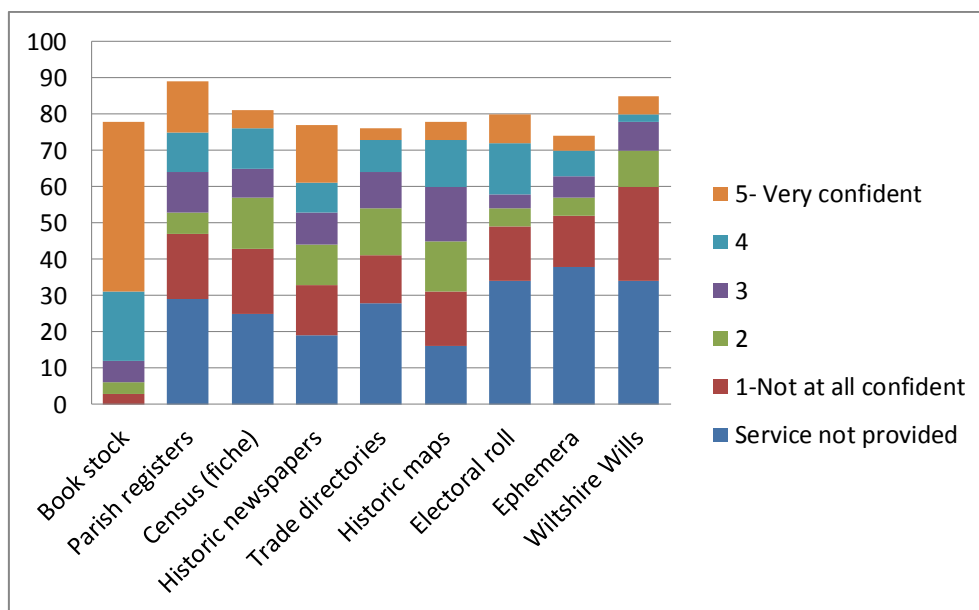


### *Staff levels of Skills and confidence*

Staff skills and confidence were measured in the survey in questions 10 and 11 which asked participants to score their level of confidence in using a list of resources on a scale of 1-5. An option of 'service not provided in this branch' was given so participants were able to distinguish between not having a service and not being confident in using a service.

#### Question 10: How confident are you in providing local studies services (physical resources)

Figure 26 illustrates staff levels of confidence on a scale of 1-5 using a variety of physical resources.

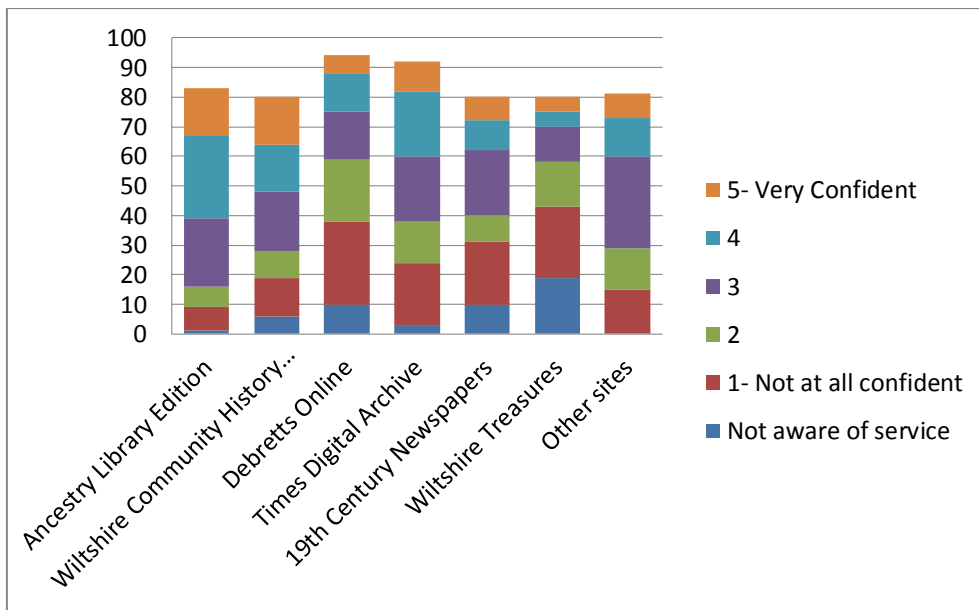


**Figure 26** Confidence levels of staff overall in using physical resources

Staff felt most confident in using the resources most commonly held and frequently used such as book stock (figure 26). 86% of staff felt that their

confidence level was 4 or above on a five point rating scale. Skills using a range of physical resources are at a similar level across the service.

Question 11: How confident are you in providing local studies services (online resources)



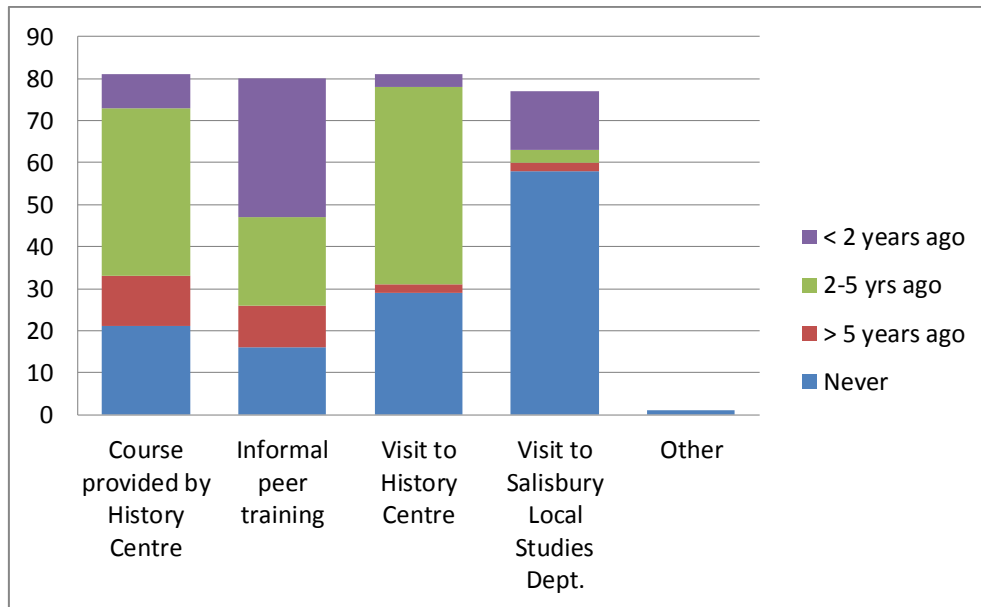
**Figure 27** Confidence levels of staff overall in using a variety of online resources

The most popular online resources such as Ancestry and Wiltshire Community History showed higher levels of staff confidence (figure 27). Skills were evenly spread across staff with similar proportions of confidence levels for each resource.

### **Objective Three**

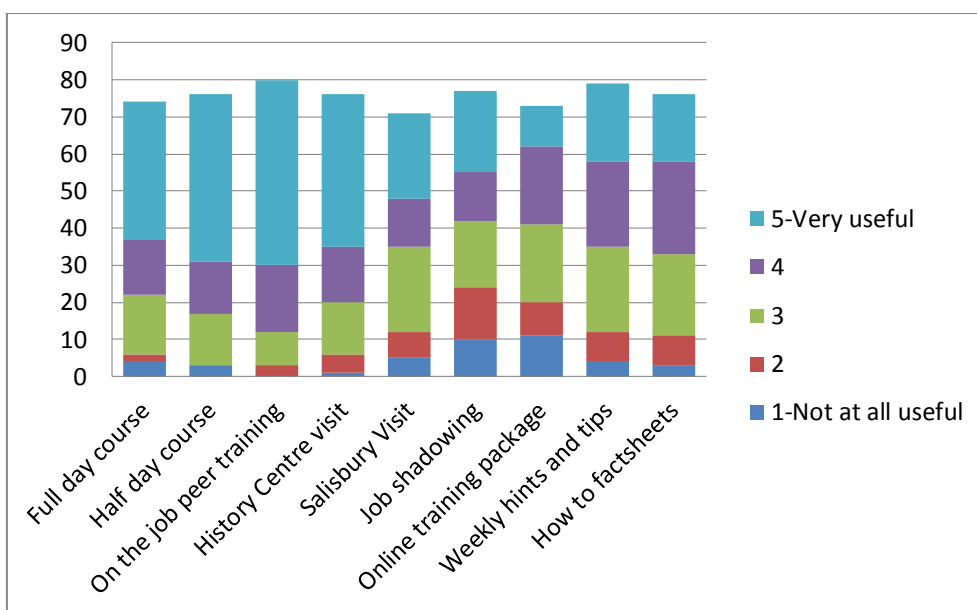
Objective Two identified specific training needs in terms of which resources staff were aware of and confident in using. Objective Three focussed on training methods. In order to fulfil this objective, questions 12, 13 and 14 of the

staff survey collected staff views on current levels of training, preferred training methods and the frequency of training required.



**Figure 28** Current staff training

The results show that over half the respondents (n=84) have attended the formal course, made a visit to the History Centre and received informal peer training within the last five years (figure 28). 24% of staff have never attended the two-module training course; a further 6% have not received any formal training in the last five years. 15% have never received any informal peer training and a further 6% have not had peer training in the last five years. Very few respondents had visited Salisbury Local Studies Library (10%).



**Figure 29** Usefulness of training methods

On the job training was the preferred method of training with 81% of staff (n=84) giving it a score of 4 or 5 out of 5 (figure 29). This was closely followed by a half-day course and a visit to the History Centre. Job shadowing, weekly hints and tips, and factsheets received a wide range of scores- showing neither a strong preference or dislike for these methods. More than half the scores for an online training package (56%, n= 73) were 3 or lower on the scale.

Those who commented on training remarked that it didn't necessarily have to be a formal course but could encompass a variety of methods:

It would definitely be helpful to have more on-the-job training and shadowing. (Respondent 1)

Without regular use the skills are lost so really a 'who to ask' or 'where to look' web page would be of the greatest assistance...  
What about a searchable online database of self-help guides?  
(Respondent 4)

This needn't be formal training- maybe an online quiz?  
(Respondent 13)

Other comments noted that it was the lack of practice rather than the lack of training that meant they lacked skills or confidence:

I really enjoyed the half day courses that I had three years ago and felt very confident afterwards. However, we were given worksheets to do back at our home library and I have never been given the time to work through them! (Respondent 28)

Learning on a course is brilliant but without practice through customer enquiries or refresher courses the information and skills get very misty fairly quickly...Training provides almost an overload of information without the context. (Respondent 54)

The majority of comments about training needs referred to local studies resources as a whole rather than on individual resources, although training for Ancestry was specifically requested in some comments:

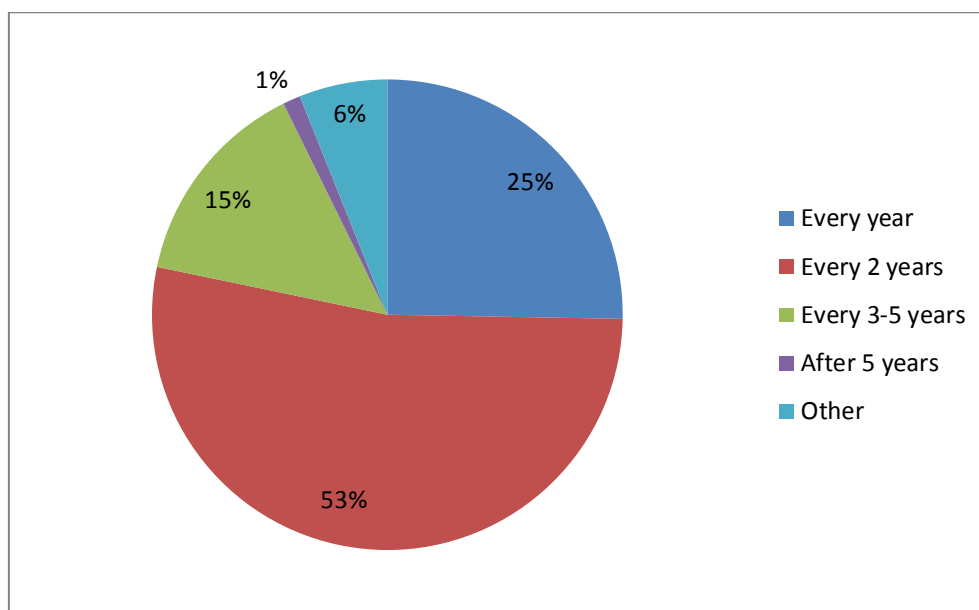
A training course in Ancestry is, I feel, a must. I can help customers access it, but from then on they're on their own. (Respondent 9)

Training on Ancestry Library Edition would be most welcome as this is a very well-used site. (Respondent 25)

Qn 14: How often do you feel a refresher course is necessary to maintain your enquiry skills?

Figure 30 shows that the majority of staff felt training every two years was sufficient to maintain local studies enquiries skills although a sizeable portion

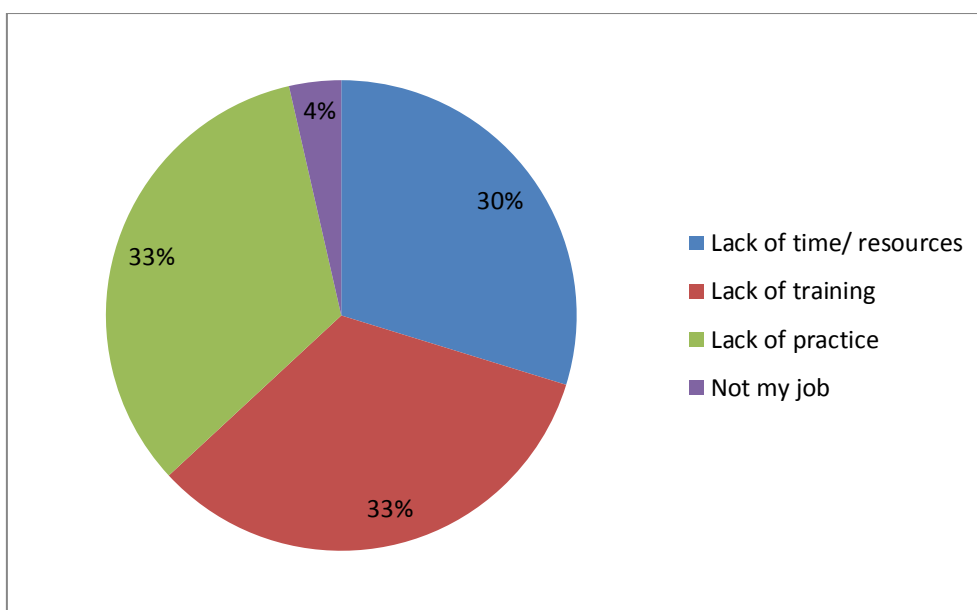
(25%) felt that once a year was necessary. Only 16% thought over 3-5 years would be sufficient.



**Figure 30** Required frequency of refresher training

#### Question 15: Other comments

31% of respondents completed the 'other comments' section. The main themes in the comments were that staff felt they no longer had the time or resources to deal with local studies enquiries; that they require further training or were under-confident in answering local studies enquiries; that the low frequency of enquiries in smaller libraries meant that skills were easily forgotten; and, finally, that it was considered a specialist field and not part of their job. Figure 31 illustrates the percentages of staff commenting on these themes. Where respondents commented on multiple themes, all themes have been counted.



**Figure 31** Other comments

Despite the high levels of enjoyment of local studies work (figure 14) and the fact that most staff consider answering local studies enquiries to be an important part of their job (figure 12), some staff feel they are unable to adequately deliver a local studies service in public branches due to the various constraints above.

Some of the comments reflecting the overall themes are listed below.

Lack of resources:

I would probably enjoy local studies provision more if we were better equipped in terms of staff and time...

...The spending cuts have reduced our ability to deal with local studies enquiries as thoroughly as we may once have done. (Respondent 16)

Generally these days there is not the time to spend looking through your local studies stock to familiarise yourself with what you do have, therefore it can make an enquiry more lengthy. (Respondent 11)

One of the other downsides to local studies enquiries, especially as a non-specialist librarian, is the lack of time to answer some enquiries...because I have many responsibilities for other areas (or a queue of customers waiting impatiently, whilst the phone rings and I am the only member of staff on the enquiry desk) I cannot always spend a long period of time helping one enquiry...it can be frustrating if I feel like I haven't been able to satisfy the query... (Respondent 51)

Lack of training or practice:

I think that libraries should be able to help people with local history but personally feel under qualified to give much more than very basic help. Also, if you don't get that many, you often forget skills quite quickly. (Respondent 37)

One of the tricky things about local studies training is that the skills developed may not be used for a very long time...the local studies provision in nearly all libraries bar Salisbury, Trowbridge and , to a lesser extent, Chippenham, is very scant, so nearly all enquiries need referral or online research. (Respondent 60)

I sometimes find it hard to know where to start. (Respondent 77)

Not part of job/ specialist field:

I feel this is quite a specialist area and library assistants won't know how to deal effectively with these queries. We would refer to History Centre. (Respondent 38)

I believe this is a specialist field and 'above my grade'! (Respondent 83)

The comments from staff accurately reflect some of the issues highlighted in the literature review which detail some of the challenges faced by public



libraries (Lilley and Usherwood, 2000; Miller, 1984; Nurse in Dewe, 1987; Paul, 1988 and 1995; Spacey, Goulding and Murray, 2003; Webster, 2005).

#### **4.4 Findings- Interviews**

##### ***Objective Four***

Interviews were conducted with three members of senior staff from public libraries and the History Centre within Wiltshire. The purpose of the interviews was to fulfil objective four of the research aim:

- To assess library managers' perceptions of the role of the public library in providing specialist local studies services where a centralised collection also exists.

Interviewees were also asked to express their views on current and future training methods to support the survey data used to fulfil the first three objectives.

The interview questions were largely based on the major themes that emerged from the literature review so the interview data is presented thematically according to those main topics. The themes were listed and assigned a number, e.g. access= 1, community identity = 2 etc. Quotes from the transcripts were then selected and given the relevant number. This allowed themes to be quickly identified and grouped together from the three transcripts. A coded extract from Interview Three is attached in the appendices.

#### **4.4.1 The role of the public library**

The first question asked interviewees to give their opinion on the role of the public library in providing a local studies service. Without exception all interviewees agreed that it was an important part of the remit of a public library service:

What struck me, particularly in my CILIP panel, is the number of people who've campaigned to keep their local studies collections open...It's something that draws people- knowing about the evolution of their community and how they fit in to that. (Interviewee 1)

...there was an uproar when we moved here [Wilshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham] because people thought the materials were being taken away from Trowbridge... (Interviewee 1)

Both interviewees Two and Three were from a library background and considered local studies provision to be a particular responsibility of public libraries:

If you think that we're a repository for books and materials that people can access then, clearly, books and materials relating to the local area, in my view, are a particular responsibility. When you think about what we're actually there to support, that's leisure, hobbies, learning, but also increasingly things like community engagement and resilient communities and so on then, again, looking at your local area, either understanding your past, your family's past, your town's past, village, whatever, that is also incredibly important...I'm not sure who would do it if we didn't, and I think that's a pretty good place to start from really. (Interviewee 2)

...it is important to have a selection of material that they can look at both hard copy and online at the library because most people are not going to go any further than that point...the other point, of course, is that it is likely to be the only, not unique material, but the only material that's

possibly quite different from the stock of any other library that they will have. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee One, Archives and Local Studies Manager and also Chair of CILIP's Local Studies Group, emphasised CILIP's professional guidelines in the area:

I kind of think CILIP LSG have built on that in our statement of what we think...why we think local studies is important, because we think that it's about bringing together community identity, bringing communities together...and I think in some respects I think libraries are very well placed for that because they're in the centre of communities. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee One also commented on the conflict between access to materials and the need for preservation:

...local people want local information available so people in Salisbury want this information available in Salisbury and then you have that question of how do you best preserve those sources, so should you have the original copies or should you have surrogate copies...I'm in favour of having a collection that is behind the scenes that people can order and then you've got a collection that is browsable and then there's also that collection which is available for loan. So there's the lending aspect which you have in local studies which you don't have in archives, for example... (Interviewee 1)

This conflict has been lessened to some extent for Wiltshire due to the way in which the collection has been acquired as compared to other authorities:

In Northamptonshire we had some valuable collections like the John Clare manuscripts and his library- which you might ordinarily think ought to be in an archive but because they were run by boroughs, they'd grown up like that. Less so in Wiltshire...it hasn't formed in the same way and what you have is a more modern collection actually, it's been built retrospectively, and so it's a different collection really than you'd

probably find in most other local studies libraries because you'd find much rarer material- more manuscript material... (Interviewee 1)

All interviewees agreed that although local collections were an important aspect of the public library offer, there were challenges to provision such as lack of resources and lack of staff training. When asked if public libraries were able to adequately provide the level of service required Interviewee Three commented:

No, I'm afraid not for most of them. Largely because of the decrease in resources, human resources mainly, that there's not the professional staff available nowadays. In fact, there aren't enough staff available for this. Also because collections have had to be cut down because again they're not generating issues...and I think probably in today's market with so much material available on the web, most libraries could not really carry the amount of stock they would need to provide an adequate service., so possibly that's three things: human resources, financial resources, and the availability of material elsewhere, really make that very difficult. (Interviewee 3)

Two of the interviewees thought that theoretically good local studies provision through public libraries should be possible:

I think they can adequately provide a service as long as they're well resourced (Interviewee 1)

If we're talking theoretically then yes, absolutely. We still have, you know, money for books, we still have our full network of libraries or certainly in Wiltshire we do, and there is absolutely no reason why that should not be provided... (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee One provided an example of how some of these challenges have affected local history projects:

We're working with SCAR [Salisbury Coalition Against Racism] in Salisbury and the Playhouse but we really need to be drawing the library

in to that, which we haven't done, because in a way the structure isn't really there, although initially we discussed it with [member of the Library Management Team] that we would use libraries as venues but actually the structure isn't really there at the moment to be really active on the ground and have the time- you haven't really got the staff who can go out and start engaging so we've been using the Playhouse where actually in an ideal world, we should be using the library service... (Interviewee 1)

For all interviewees, a clear structure of levels of service in public library branches supported by the specialist History Centre was the key to effective and modern service delivery.

#### **4.4.2 History centres and public libraries**

Interviewees were asked about the relationship between the centralised collection at the History Centre and the public libraries:

Interviewee One stressed that complete centralisation was not desirable:

I don't think everything should be centralised in one library, I think that's wrong and I don't think we'd want it in Wiltshire...that's where we have a role in trying to make that accessible (Interviewee 1)

They went on to suggest an ideal arrangement between centralised collections and those in public libraries:

I think my ideal structure is that you do need a central collection because you do need specialist preservation and conservation and specialist knowledge, you can't spread that too thinly. Then I think you need hubs. Because people do expect to have some information locally and I think there you've got what I think is a second tier of information where you do have a larger collection of local studies material that's fairly well defined, but you wouldn't have original manuscripts there, I would think, because that really is too difficult to maintain...And then you'd have what I'd call a third tier where you have, and it depends how many tiers you want to go,

but you'd have some basic reference materials that are available and some internet access. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewees Two and Three outlined similar structures:

...the more specialist the requirement from the customer perhaps the further away or higher up an organisation chart or system chart they will need to go, so, for example, I would expect any new person who moved to Purton to be able to visit the local library and find the parish magazine, any general history books on the area...local maps...a range of things. The more specialist their requirement, if they're doing in-depth research...that is when they may need to contact by phone or visit here [History Centre]. (Interviewee 2)

In the local studies policy for Wiltshire we went through provision for libraries level by level and said what should really be available and, I think in general terms, a local library can provide material on its immediate area, its own area of benefit or catchment, if you like, so it should look to answer general enquiries ...about that area, not necessarily about Wiltshire as a whole...I mean Level Seven libraries I would expect to be different, possibly level six, but in general terms I think we can only really expect them to answer reasonably basic enquiries and anything more complicated really does need to come here [History Centre]. (Interviewee 3)

As well as supporting resources and training, Interviewee One also commented on the role of the History Centre and public libraries in other areas such as outreach work, audience development and promotion which play a key role in the localism and building resilient communities agendas.

One of our philosophies is we help people manage their local history projects and get involved, we don't give people their local history, because that's kind of the old way, and that's why fewer people are engaged. There's no point just putting an exhibition up on the history of Salisbury, better to have people in Salisbury working on that exhibition themselves... (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee One also indicated that the merging of heritage services, particularly Archives and Local Studies, can have a negative effect on local studies, particularly within libraries:

The biggest issue actually for local studies libraries is when they merge with archives...what tends to happen when they merge is that it tends to be the local studies element that is diluted but the archive tends to be the larger service with about 7-8 miles of material, whereas the local studies only has about 1 mile at best. And you could take a view about how much that's happened here, although we're outward looking in terms of working with communities we've actually kind of turned in on ourselves and not thought about the libraries anymore because what we're actually thinking is how we work with Archaeology, how we work with Conservation, Museums Advisory and the buildings Record...and we've got an identity as the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. (Interviewee 1)

Overall, interviewees agreed that it was a positive relationship that local communities would benefit from.

It's a way of working with the History Centre, here, regarding us, not necessarily as the font of all knowledge, but regarding us as a big brother to lean upon when anything is needed. (Interviewee 3)

Several of the comments stressed that this system worked 'in theory' and acknowledged that further work needed to be done to accomplish it in practice.

#### **4.4.3 Staff training**

All interviewees agreed that the tiered structure outlined in the policy was the most effective method of providing local studies services in public libraries. Interviewees were asked what methods of training they thought would best deliver this system in practice:

Interviewee One stressed the importance of the Wiltshire Studies Team:

[The team] sets out the levels and the sort of training and [County Local studies Librarian] creating staff modules of training that is available and at what level does that training...where does it go?...to what degree are they trained and at what levels? It should all fit in with the plan and the level of materials and should be about how to get the best use out of the materials you have locally... (Interviewee 1)

It was acknowledged by all those interviewed, however, that wasn't necessarily what was happening in practice:

...actually we see quite a lot of referrals where actually the information is already available and you could answer the question locally...I think there was always some kind of tier system but I don't think it's been working as well as it should have been. So we need to do more work on that, I think... (Interviewee 1)

I think we've always struggled to get people to not send people away with a very well-meant, well-delivered and brilliantly customer-served 'no', when actually the answer isn't 'no'...because I think we're very good on customer service, whether that's giving the right answer or not...but I think you will get a variety of knowledge out there and I think that is something which we are aware we have to work on. Because that's the key. (Interviewee 2)

Asked if there was currently adequate staff training, Interviewee Three commented:

No, no. Because there isn't time. And if I have the time to do it we don't have time for the staff to be able to do it, is the problem. I mean there's a lot more specialist training we could provide...which could be quite helpful but it would take up quite a lot of staff hours... (Interviewee 3)



In terms of specific areas of training Interviewee Three considered that although some things e.g. family history, could be covered in online training packages, other important resources requires face-to-face tuition:

I think training in maps is required for most people because they don't understand maps, even fairly simple OS ones and that is definitely needed. The other thing which would be helpful would be giving staff a course in the history of their own area...And the trouble with something like a course on maps is you really need to have the maps there- you can't really do it on screen. (Interviewee 3)

Two of the interviewees referred to the wider problem of the lack of professional courses and training:

I think the problem also is CILIP LSG never updated the 'What makes a good local studies library' since the 1990s and that's largely because we're tied into the CILIP imprint, the publisher, and we're not allowed to put anything updated on the web because, you know, they're still publishing it...it's so out of date, and there's no incentive for the group. We're looking at how we can do things, and how we can provide training and things...I guess because there's no training really in universities, we can see how we provide that gap... (Interviewee 1)

There's no course for local studies librarians now, at all, we're not training them. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewees were asked to comment on how they thought training should be delivered given constraints of time and resources. Two of the interviewees agreed that a new approach was necessary to deliver modern services:

Most of it [training] used to be on-the-job but if you've only got one County Local Studies Librarian then you're not really going to be teaching, so in a way it becomes you end up with staff with hardly any knowledge and you end up with one person. I always call it the 'episcopal approach', you know, it comes through the bishop- it's all interpreted...rather than the 'Calvinist approach' with everyone

interpreting it. It's kind of changing that notion that everything comes from one person or one team, that actually it's broadening it out... (Interviewee 1)

I think as long as you are supporting the development of policy and have the right skills at the top, so long as you have got the County Local Studies Librarian post...and then you can set up the right mechanism for transferring those skills then, yes, I think you can make it happen. Is that the same as having a fully-trained local studies librarian in your five biggest libraries? Well, no, probably not- does that make it bad? I'm not so sure...no, I think it doesn't- I think you're doing what you can. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee One was able to give an overview of a national approach to new ways of training from CILIP LSG's viewpoint:

The thing we've been trying to look at, because you need to work with other groups, is can you work with your local university like Bath Spa who have run a Heritage MA and undergraduate modules, can you then also work with the local South West Federation of Museums and Galleries, can you work with the regional Organisation of the Archives and Records Association, and can you come together and deliver generic training sessions that actually everybody benefits from?...So you've got to redefine the way in which CILIP LSG works and provides training, and I think it's about coming together in smaller regions... (Interviewee 1)

In terms of Wiltshire training programs for local studies, it was clear from interviewees' comments that training needs to be tailored for staff to be able to know the resources they have, including online sources, and where to refer customers for resources they don't have:

I think we're certainly not where we need to be...I do think we can get there, as I've said, it depends on when we have a clear policy...although I daresay most of our staff have not read it...our job is to make sure they're aware of it, what their responsibility is wherever they are, and what can be done by people other than them, and that is what those training sessions should be about...not just that there's a training course

and everyone goes through it and afterwards we discover it was great for what it was but didn't cover what it needed to. (Interviewee 2)

## **4.5 Summary of findings**

### Questionnaires

Current local studies provision does largely reflect the tiered structure laid out in the local studies policy for Wiltshire. However, there are some discrepancies particularly in the smaller libraries regarding the variety of resources held.

Attitudes to local studies work and training, and levels of skills and confidence vary widely across different job grades and library levels. There is some evidence that staff in larger libraries are sometimes more aware and confident in local studies than those in smaller libraries, though this is not exclusively the case. Job title made no difference in attitudes to local studies work.

The current training programme has some degree of success. Most staff have participated in the modular course and/ or visited the History Centre. The current frequency of training was deemed by the majority of staff to be adequate. However, staff indicated that lack of practice often left them feeling 'rusty' and that more varied and informal methods of training may be useful.

### Interviews

All three interviewees stressed that some provision of local studies was important locally in public libraries, but it was also acknowledged that public libraries could no longer devote the resources necessary to maintain large specialist and valuable collections and that a new way of providing the service

was necessary. In Wiltshire the aim is to accomplish this through a system of tiered provision with the History Centre supporting larger hubs such as Salisbury and Trowbridge; and smaller lending collections combined with strong online support in smaller libraries. This structure in many ways addresses the issues raised in the literature about access and preservation; lack of specialist staff and the capability to deliver services.

While this tiered system has been outlined in policy, the interviewees agreed that further work was necessary to translate the policy into practice in local branches. It was also acknowledged that the relationship between the History Centre and public libraries was not currently working as effectively as it might.

This should be largely resolved through the Wiltshire Studies Team; the Local Studies Champions; and new methods of training.

These issues are analysed in more depth in the following analysis chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the research. Each section analyses the results in relation to the objectives set out in the introduction. Survey responses, interview data and findings from the literature review are integrated and discussed as a whole where relevant to the objective. The concluding section considers the extent to which the findings satisfy the aim of the research.

### **5.2 Objective One: Assess the current level of local studies resources and services provided in public library branches**

In order to fulfil this objective a staff survey was undertaken. Data from the survey was compared to the guidance for local studies provision that is set out in the appendix of Wiltshire's local studies policy (Wiltshire Council, 2013). The policy outlines the level of service provision that should be provided in the public library branches and the role of the History Centre in supporting the branches. Senior managers were also asked what level of provision they would expect to see throughout the various levels of library branches according to library and population size and location.

### ***Policy guidelines***

The local studies policy advises that Level 3 libraries should contain Reference and lending books on the town/ village and adjacent parishes and the local parish newsletters. Level 4- 6 libraries should contain books on the local area as well as key texts on Wiltshire; parish newsletters; copies of trade and street directories; folded Ordnance Survey maps; local newspapers and parish registers (Wiltshire Council, 2013, Para. 6).

### ***Public library collections***

The results from the survey highlighted some discrepancies in service provision, particularly among the smaller libraries. It is necessary to note that respondents were asked which resources they were *aware* of; it is therefore possible that a library provided a resource but the staff member was not aware of it. This may be accountable for some of the discrepancies found. It is also important to note that there was a very low response rate from level three libraries (38%) so results for these libraries may not be representative of the sample as a whole.

The main discrepancies in these libraries were in the holdings of physical stock such as local interest books, maps and parish registers. While the physical collections in some libraries do vary across levels and are not entirely in line with the policy, size of library and local population are not the only factors that will affect the nature of the local studies collection. Libraries in towns and villages that have a particular point of interest may have local studies collections that reflect this and seem out of proportion with the size of the library or town itself. Libraries may also have collected local studies material in

different ways; local studies collections in smaller libraries have been managed by local Community Librarians who may have had varying levels of interest, enthusiasm and collecting criteria for local studies material.

Awareness of online resources was more uniform across levels. All levels of library provide public access to online resources, so where respondents stated that they were not aware of a resource it was because they didn't know about it rather than lack of provision. Awareness of *Ancestry Library Edition* was particularly high; findings from question 6 of the survey show this is the most commonly used resource. The *Wiltshire and Community History* website was also well-used although staff levels of awareness are lower than for *Ancestry*. There was a clear correlation between popular resources and an increase in staff awareness and confidence in using that resource. These results are confirmed by comments from staff in question 15 of the survey that the lack of practice in using a resource, rather than lack of initial training, is a major factor in their success at answering an enquiry.

In the interviews with both library and local studies managers, all interviewees agreed that the most practical and appropriate way to organise provision was via a tiered system based roughly on library levels. The Wiltshire Local Studies Policy outlines this provision in some detail (Wiltshire Council, 2013).

All interviewees acknowledged that while this system should work in theory, its success relies upon local staff knowing their own and other resources, and recognising when and where to refer an enquiry.

### ***Volume and type of enquiry***

As well as building a picture of the provision of resources in public libraries, the first section of the survey measured how many enquiries were received in branches and what the most frequent enquiries were. As the policy suggests a tiered system of provision based on library levels, it was interesting to discover from the results any relationship between the level of library and the usage of local studies resources. There is some correlation between size of library and usage levels of resources: Level 7 libraries generally receive more local studies enquires than smaller libraries, however, level four and six libraries produced some interesting results regarding the number of enquiries received. Level 4 libraries seem to receive above average levels of local studies enquiries while level 6 libraries are relatively low. Possible explanations for this are that, as previously mentioned, some towns will have local sites of particular interest or other aspects of their history which attract more enquiries. Another factor to bear in mind is that some towns have other sources of local information such as museums and history groups which may divert enquiries away from libraries. For example, Warminster and Devizes libraries (Level 6) and Salisbury Library (level 7) share a site with or are near museums. Chippenham Library (Level 7) is located near the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

Question 6 of the survey asked participants what their most common enquires were. Responses were similar across all levels for each resource. *Ancestry Library Edition* was the most frequently used resource, followed by enquiries about the local village or town history, house or building history and map



enquiries. The provision throughout public libraries as stated in the policy and as seen in the survey results caters well for these enquiries.

As far as available resources in public libraries are concerned, the results show that there is a good coverage of resources in line with what could be expected of a library of a particular size. Basic enquiries can be answered from a range of physical and online resources, though staff need to be aware of where various resources are located for appropriate referral of customers.

### **5.3 Objective Two: Assess the level of skills and confidence of local branch staff in using a variety of resources to answer local studies enquiries**

As well as provision of resources, delivery of the service was also explored. In order to assess the capability of public libraries in effectively providing local studies services a survey was undertaken to measure staff skills and confidence in using local studies resources.

#### ***Attitudes to local studies work***

Questions 2 and 3 of the survey indicated high levels of enjoyment in local studies work and a wide acknowledgment across all grades of staff that local studies is important to their job. Amongst Librarians, Supervisors and Library Assistants there was very little difference in attitudes to local studies; Relief and Saturday Assistants expressed slightly lower levels, although these staff do not receive formal training in local studies and are not expected to answer local studies enquiries.

Despite the high enjoyment levels indicated, there were some staff with very low awareness of some major services provided, and many staff indicated lower levels of confidence in their ability to use some resources.

### ***Staff skills and confidence***

Participants in the survey were asked a variety of questions which assessed their awareness of resources held in the local studies department at Salisbury Library; at the History Centre; and online, and were asked to indicate their level of confidence in using a range of physical and online resources.

Awareness of the services provided in Salisbury Library was low. This is to be expected to some extent as there are relatively few libraries in the southern half of the county compared to the north, and Salisbury's collection focuses mainly on the southern half of the county. Awareness of resources at the History Centre was much higher overall. Around 80% of respondents were aware of the major resources such as Archives, Buildings Record and Wiltshire Studies Library. The high levels of awareness for the History Centre's resources indicate that the current training received by all staff except Relief and Saturday Assistants is providing people with a sound knowledge of resources available.

Larger libraries with more resources and more frequent enquiries tended to indicate higher levels of awareness and skills in some areas than staff in smaller libraries though this was not always the case, and there was a sizeable proportion of staff in larger libraries with low skill levels.

It ought to be taken into account that level 7 results may be misleading in some areas due to the differences in the three largest libraries that make up level seven. Salisbury has a separate local studies department and although most staff have some experience of working in this department, there are staff that have no experience of local studies work as they will simply refer enquiries to the dedicated department. Therefore, although they may work in a library with a large number of resources and enquiries, there will be a relatively large number of staff with low awareness and local studies skills, as compared to a smaller library where all staff answer all types of enquiry. Chippenham Library, although Level 7, has the unique characteristic of being located in the same town as the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre and will subsequently refer many enquiries there, also accounting for a lower than expected levels of local studies skills.

Awareness of and confidence using online resources varied depending on the resource. Generally, staff were more confident using popular resources that are more frequently asked for such as *Ancestry* and the *Wiltshire Community History* website. The results were similar for physical resources. The majority of staff felt very confident in using Wiltshire Classification to locate local interest books in their own libraries. Results were more mixed for other physical resources.

There were problems interpreting the results for some of the resources as respondents' answers indicated a much wider holding of some resources than is indicated in the Local Studies Policy. This suggests that either the local

studies policy is inaccurate and there are some very small libraries with many more resources than expected, or that respondents misinterpreted what was meant by some of the resources. This seems to have particularly been the case with fiche, maps and ephemera. For example, current folded ordnance survey maps and census returns on Ancestry may have been included in people's responses. This ambiguity may therefore be reflected in the results which show that collections are uneven.

Where staff made comments at the end of the survey, they frequently observed that although training may be beneficial, it was a combination of lack of practice and lack of knowledge of specialist resources that hindered their ability to assist with local studies enquiries. The results from this section of the survey largely reflect those of a similar staff survey conducted in Melbourne Library Service (Bateman, 2012). The Melbourne survey was prompted by the realisation among library managers that enquiries about local history "intimidate library staff the most" and that the level of service users received could be "inconsistent" and "depended on luck and whether the enquirer spoke to the right person" (2012, p. 14). The results from the survey showed that most staff (more than 80%) were interested in local history but that local history services were "shrouded in mystery, and the domain of specialist staff only". In the Melbourne survey around 30% of staff felt their skill level was "terrible or non-existent" (2012, p. 14). In the Wiltshire survey, the average percentage of respondents giving their confidence levels using a range of physical resources a low score of 1 or 2 was 48%. For online resources, the average was 47%. Although this is a high percentage, it is the average across all resources as a whole. The results for individual resources, physical and online, showed that

staff were much more confident in using the most popular resources. Nevertheless, nearly half of respondents felt under-confident in using a range of local studies resources provided in their libraries.

These findings answer part of the research question in that, currently, public libraries are not always able to provide an adequate local studies service.

#### **5.4 Objective Three: Identify training needs**

The literature review highlighted the lack of any staff survey in the UK to ascertain training needs. As part of this research, the staff survey asked participants when they had last received various types of training, what types of training they thought would be useful, and how often they considered training to be necessary.

##### ***Training needs***

Currently, a two module course is delivered by the County Local Studies Librarian and forms part of all staff's training (Wiltshire, 2012, Para.16). Training needs are assessed as part of staff induction and during the annual appraisal process.

The results reflect that this process is working relatively well and over half the respondents have attended the formal course, made a visit to the History Centre and/ or received informal peer training within the last five years. Very few respondents had visited Salisbury Local Studies Library (10%) and most of

those who had were probably staff who work in Salisbury Library. However, as previously noted, this would be of limited value to most staff that work in libraries in the north of the county and are closer to the History Centre.

### ***Preferred methods of training***

Of the various methods offered, most participants considered on the job/ peer training to be the most effective type of training. This method was widely recommended in the literature review (Crompton, 2011; Holt, 1999; Paben and Fricke, 2011; Stec Dankert and Dempsey, 2002).

More than half the scores for an online training package were 3 or lower on the scale indicating a somewhat negative attitude toward that particular method. It is difficult to know whether this negative attitude towards online training is due to this method being ineffective compared to other methods, or due to a general lack of computer competence or confidence. This reflects the results of an investigation into the effectiveness of the European Computer Driving Licence training package by King, McMenemy and Poulter in 2006 concluded that respondents had concerns about the usefulness of online training packages as they were 'how to' guides and didn't teach skills such as problem-solving (p. 272).

In the interviews with library and local studies managers, interviewees agreed that new methods of training were required to reach staff in local branches.

For Interviewee One, the key to the successful implementation of the policy was through the Wiltshire Studies Team, who should plan the various degrees of training and tailor training needs to local levels of resources. It was

acknowledged by all interviewees, however, that wasn't necessarily what was happening in practice:

Two of the interviewees acknowledged the wider issue raised in the literature about the lack of training for professional librarians in universities or other vocational courses, and commented on CILIP's role in filling that gap. Interviewee One discussed the potential for a new national approach to ways of training from CILIP LSG's viewpoint and suggested working in partnership with other academic and heritage organisations was a possible way forward. This is similar to the approach taken by Melbourne Library Service who stressed the advantages of working with historical societies to deliver training and support resources (Bateman, 2012, p. 14).

Interviewees were asked to comment on how they thought training should be delivered given constraints of time and resources. Interviewee One commented on the flaws of the more traditional methods of training and agreed that a new approach was necessary to deliver modern services. Interviewee Two argued that the decline of specialist posts has been a trend over the last ten to fifteen years, regardless of austerity, and emphasised that it was possible to continue delivering high quality previously specialist services including local studies in public libraries with the right approach.

In terms of Wiltshire training programs for local studies, it was clear from interviewees' comments that training needed to be specific to the resources staff had in their libraries so that staff were able to use the resources available to them, including those online, and had a good awareness of resources held elsewhere to enable appropriate referrals. Interviewees concluded that there

was not sufficient training currently to facilitate the expected level of service and two of the interviewees indicated that there needed to be more proactive involvement from the Wiltshire Studies Team and Local Studies Champions.

These findings reflect concerns in the literature that staff training at both a professional level and branch level is not adequately preparing staff for the increasing demands placed upon local studies and reference departments (Barber, 2007; Holt, 1996; Miller, 1984; Paul, 1988; Reid, 2003; Smith, 2002).

#### **5.5 Objective Four: Assess library managers' perceptions of the role of the public library in providing local studies services where a centralised collection also exists**

##### ***The role of public libraries***

All of the managers interviewed agreed that local studies provision was an important part of the remit of a public library service. Many of the comments reflected those in the literature, remarking on the unique place in the community the public library has to provide easy access to services and to strengthen community identity and cohesion through local history collections (Banerjee & Chakrabarty, 2004; Chowdhury, Poulter & McMenemy, 2006; Melrose, 2001; Reid and Macafee, 2007).

Interviewee One commented that local communities feel very linked to their community history and, often, when there have been protests about library closures, people have campaigned as much for their local studies collections as



anything else. Interviewee Two, a senior manager in libraries, argued that a local studies service is a particular responsibility of public libraries. Similarly, Interviewee Three, a specialist local studies librarian, considered a local collection readily accessible by the community to be an important aspect of public library services. Interviewee One, Archives and Local Studies Manager and also Chair of CILIP's Local Studies Group, emphasised CILIP's professional guidelines in the area which state that it is "a core element of public library provision and, as such, it is fundamental to a thriving economy, democracy, culture and civilisation" (CILIP, 2012).

### ***Challenges of local studies provision in public libraries***

Overall, interviewees thought that, in theory, it should be possible to deliver local studies services in public libraries but that there would have to be varying degrees of service and a clear referral process. Interviewees acknowledged, however, that, in practice, there were some challenges to provision. These challenges were largely the same as those highlighted in the literature review: lack of resources and lack of staff training (Lilley and Usherwood, 2000; Miller, 1984; Nurse in Dewe, 1987; Paul, 1988 and 1995; Spacey, Goulding and Murray, 2003; Webster, 2005). When asked if public libraries were able to adequately provide the level of service required Interviewee Three answered clearly in the negative, "largely because of the decrease in resources, human resources mainly". Several comments from staff surveys confirmed this to be the case in their local branches.

Interviewee Two was more positive about what public libraries, with the right approach, should be able to offer, commenting that with a full network of libraries and a stock fund, Wiltshire should be in a position to offer a good service, and Interviewee One concluded, “I think they can adequately provide a service as long as they’re well resourced”.

From the variety of comments provided in the interviews, it is clear that opinions about the level of service a public library can and should provide are based largely upon the individual’s perception of what an ‘adequate’ level of local studies provision is. For public libraries with limited resources, it is especially important that this is clearly defined in policy and can be transmitted to staff in branches through training pertinent to their own resources.

### ***The History Centre and public libraries***

When considering the role of the public library in providing local studies services, all interviewees agreed that varying levels of physical collections should be based in public libraries, supported by a variety of online resources. Larger libraries or ‘hubs’ may offer more resources but with the facilities and expertise available at the History Centre, anything more than basic enquiries should, in most cases, be referred there.

As well as supporting resources and training, Interviewee One commented on the role of the History Centre and public libraries in other areas such as outreach work, audience development and promotion which play a key role in the localism and building resilient communities agendas. While local libraries

might be seen as the natural partner in these community projects, it was acknowledged by Interviewee One that public libraries perhaps weren't being utilised in local projects as they might be. Interviewee One also indicated that the merging of heritage services, particularly Archives and Local Studies, can have a negative effect on local studies departments which are often 'diluted'. This increases the importance of having collections represented in local library branches.

When considering the future of local studies provision in the literature, Gorman (2007, p. 488) reflected on the potential of libraries working more closely with other cultural institutions, and Ansell (1987, p. 48-9) promoted a more integrated service to the public. Wiltshire's structure of local studies services reflects this and should be achievable, argued all the interviewees, through the system of tiered levels of provision, with the History Centre at the supportive core of the service. This relationship aims to provide a solution to many of the challenges facing local studies provision in public libraries. However, several of the comments stressed that this system worked 'in theory' and acknowledged that further work needed to be done to accomplish it in practice.

## **5.6 Summary**

By measuring the extent of local studies provision and the skills of library staff, the first three objectives assessed the capability of public libraries to effectively deliver local studies services.

The survey showed that skills and confidence levels amongst staff were extremely varied, and that staff generally felt under-confident in answering local studies enquiries. Staff comments supported many of the arguments in the literature that lack of training, time and resources impact heavily on their ability to deliver an adequate service. A recent survey-based study in Melbourne Library Service produced similar results (Bateman, 2012).

Interviews with senior managers revealed that a new local studies policy provided clear guidelines on provision in public libraries and how they work in conjunction with History Centre services, but indicated that the policy was not necessarily being implemented at branch level and that further staff training was necessary to deliver the policy in practice.

It was generally agreed that local studies provision is an important aspect of a public library's role and that, theoretically, libraries should be able to provide an adequate service, but that levels of provision need to be clearly defined for staff. To some extent, the findings from this research contradict arguments in the literature that centralised collections are the best way forward for local studies provision (Dewe, 2002; Friggens, 1998; Gorman, 2007). While the History Centre is a necessary repository for valuable materials and specialist knowledge and services, the public library network is still a vital tool in providing access and fostering community involvement in local history, and it is a combination of the two services working together that provides a solution to many of the challenges facing local studies provision.

Although the results of this research can only accurately reflect the situation in the case study authority, the findings closely reflected those of a similar survey

in Australia, and it is hoped that they can be relatable to other UK authorities where centralised collections and public library collections coexist.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research was to examine the role of public libraries in the provision of local studies and to assess their capability to deliver this service. This was investigated through four objectives which were measured using a case study design. This chapter reflects on whether the objectives have met the aim of the research; assesses the effectiveness of the methods used to conduct the research; and considers the overall contribution of the research. It also includes recommendations for improving current service delivery.

### **6.2 Conclusions**

#### ***Aims and objectives***

- Objective One: Assess the current level of local studies resources and services provided in public library branches

A comparison of survey data and the guidelines in the Local Studies Policy provided an overview of what resources are currently held in public branches. The results successfully answered the research question, showing that public libraries have an important role in providing access to some degree of local studies material to their communities.

- Objective Two: Assess the level of skills and confidence of local branch staff in using a range of resources to answer local studies enquiries

The case study survey data confirmed similar studies and evidence from the literature that staff skills vary widely and that a large number of staff felt under-confident in answering local studies enquiries. As this has a significant impact on the delivery of local studies services in public libraries, it suggested that libraries are currently not always capable of providing an adequate service.

- Objective Three: Identify training needs

The survey results and comments reflected those of the Melbourne Survey and arguments in favour of peer and in-house training in the literature. This objective related to the research aim in that it highlighted shortcomings of current training methods and provided ideas for how training might be improved to allow public libraries deliver local studies provision more effectively.

- Objective Four: Assess library manager's perceptions of the role of the public library in providing local studies services where a centralised collection also exists

The interviewees unanimously felt that local studies services were a core part of public library provision. Managers felt that any impact the History Centre had on public libraries should be positive. The interviews highlighted that the relationship between the two is not working as effectively as perhaps it could.

## ***Methods***

The case study research design was an effective method for studying the complex issues raised in the literature review. There was very little literature concerning the relationship between centralised collections and public libraries. Two main themes in the literature formulated the aim and objectives: the

challenges facing public libraries in delivering local studies services, particularly the lack of well-trained staff; and whether public libraries should have collections at all given the increase in specialist heritage centres.

The case study design allowed detailed examination of a variety of issues and although the results may be less representative, they are hopefully more meaningful than a larger-scale less detailed project would have allowed. A mixture of methods for data collection combined the advantages of both large volumes of easily comparable quantitative data with valuable qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. Ideally, had time allowed, more interviews would have been undertaken, perhaps with a Community Librarian, who is both a manager and a frontline member of staff familiar with the challenges of day-to-day enquiries. The questionnaires, too, though piloted twice with a range of staff, presented a variety of challenges at the analysis stage. Designing the questionnaire again, a 'don't know' option would be added to reduce blank responses; the resources would have been clarified still further to avoid confusion between modern and historical material such as maps; and, for ease of analysis and presentation of results, the five point scales would have been labelled with statements rather than a 1-5 rating scale which is open to participant interpretation and results in less 'standardised' responses.

However, the chosen mixed methods approach did enable successful investigation of the objectives.

### ***Research value***

Much of the literature on the subject is quite dated and even more current papers express concerns about the same challenges, indicating little change.



Current literature about training staff in a library setting and elsewhere advocates the self-assessment staff survey, which enables an assessment of staff's current skills and asks them what they need and what kinds of training they respond to. No such survey had taken place in UK libraries though a similar survey in Melbourne, Australia yielded extremely useful results and greatly improved service provision. This research used a similar survey in the case study authority and, it is hoped, will prove equally valuable in assessing staff skills and training needs.

This research also undertook to define the role of the library service in providing local studies services where a centralised collection also exists. Interviews clarified the position of library and archives managers in their support of public library collections but also highlighted some of the areas where the working relationship with the History Centre might be improved. This is discussed further in the recommendations section.

While a case study approach may yield results specific to one authority and are therefore not representative of other authorities, public libraries in all authorities are facing similar challenges, and it is hoped that this research may be relatable to authorities where a centralised collection operates alongside collections in the public library network.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

The following recommendations may overcome some of the issues revealed in the research:

- A clear definition of services and referral processes should be made more readily available to staff to enable efficient service to the public and reduce incidents of unnecessary visits to the History Centre, or customers being passed between too many service points. This could partially be achieved through the development of an online quick reference guide to resources in the style of a flowchart. A county map of the locations of museums and history groups to support enquiries may also be useful.
- The existing Wiltshire Studies Team could be more proactive to provide improved interaction between the History Centre and public libraries. Improved communication with library branches and the Library Management Team is necessary to translate the policy into practice.
- The current local studies training modules are effective and provide a good and necessary induction to local studies services in the county. However, frequent refreshers are required through informal methods such as online quizzes, dummy enquiries to practice skills and regular communications about new or updated resources. This could potentially be a role for the new Local Studies Champions.

- Local Studies Champions need to be used more proactively in the provision of training through peer training and on-the-job training. Online training packages could also be supported through Local Studies Champions.
- Training for staff should reflect more closely the tiered provision in the policy so that staff receive training more pertinent to their own collections and communities. This should be co-ordinated by the Wiltshire Studies Team.

#### **6.4 Further research**

If time and resources had allowed it would have been interesting and worthwhile to investigate the impact of online resources and digitisation on local studies provision, and the repercussions for staff training. The interviews touched upon some of these issues but a deeper investigation of staff skills in this area would have been useful in ascertaining future training requirements.

There is also more scope for investigating further collaboration and ways of working between libraries, history centres and other heritage services such as museums and local history groups, not just for the case study authority but more widely. Again, the case study results outlined some ideas about how it could work, but a more in-depth examination could help put these ideas into practice.

## ***Summary***

The case study research has confirmed that both public libraries and history centres have advantages and disadvantages regarding local studies collections. But it has also shown that where both exist, as long as there is a clear structure of service provision and well-informed, trained staff, many of the challenges facing local studies provision can be overcome to the advantage of both collections and users.

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## **APPENDIX 1- Questionnaire**

### **Local Studies Provision Survey**

You are being invited to take part in a research project investigating the provision of local studies services in public libraries. The research will culminate in the production of a dissertation which will be submitted as part of the course requirements for the MSc (Econ) Information and Library Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. The results may also be used to assist the design of future local studies training courses.

**Participation in the survey is voluntary. By answering this questionnaire and returning it to the researcher you have given your consent for your answers to be used in this research. All responses are anonymous.**

### **Part 1: About you**

1. Which of the following best describes your role? (Please circle)

Librarian      Supervisor      Full/part time Library Assistant      Relief/ Saturday

2. How important do you think local studies enquiry skills are to your job? (1= not at all important, 5= very important)

1      2      3      4      5

3. a) To what extent do you find local studies work enjoyable? (1= not at all enjoyable, 5= very enjoyable)

1      2      3      4      5

b) Please indicate why you do or do not enjoy local studies work:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## **Part 2: Library resources**

4. What local studies services are you aware your library provides? (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Local interest books (less than one bay)    ☐ Ancestry Library Edition
- ☐ Local interest books (more than one bay)    ☐ Maps
- ☐ Parish registers (fiche)    ☐ Census returns (fiche)
- ☐ Trade directories    ☐ Local newspapers (microfilm)
- ☐ Ephemera collection    ☐ Wiltshire Community History Website
- ☐ Wiltshire monumental inscriptions    ☐ International Genealogical Index
- ☐ Wiltshire Wills    ☐
- Other.....

5. Roughly how many local studies enquiries does your library receive? (Fill in whichever is most relevant- you do not need to fill in all three)

Per day.....    per week.....    Per month.....

6. Please indicate with a tick roughly how frequently your library receives the queries listed in the table below (you can leave a space blank if you don't know):

| Query                                  | Often | Sometimes | Never |
|--|-------|-----------|-------|
| People: use of <i>Ancestry</i>         |       |           |       |
| People: other family history enquiries |       |           |       |
| People: well-known Wiltshire people    |       |           |       |
| People/ Place: use of census           |       |           |       |
| Place: city/ town/ village             |       |           |       |
| Place: place name meaning              |       |           |       |

| Query                                | Often | Sometimes | Never |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Place: historic sites e.g Stonehenge |       |           |       |
| Place: house or building history     |       |           |       |
| Place: use of maps                   |       |           |       |
| Transport- roads, canals, railways   |       |           |       |
| Footpaths                            |       |           |       |
| Industry, trade or business          |       |           |       |
| Named or dated event                 |       |           |       |
| Other (please specify)               |       |           |       |

**7. Which of these resources at Salisbury Local Studies Library are you aware of?**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Salisbury Journal</i> on film          | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Salisbury Times</i> on film |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South Wiltshire parish registers on fiche | <input type="checkbox"/> Census returns on fiche        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm/fiche viewer and printer        | <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire Monuments on fiche   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire Wills Magazine                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire Archaeological       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electoral registers                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade directories              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ephemera collection maps                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Southern county historical     |

**8. Which of these History Centre services/ resources are you aware of?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire Buildings Record                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire & Swindon Archives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire Studies Library                  | <input type="checkbox"/> School log books             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage Collection- general history books | <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire newspapers         |

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire census returns                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Wiltshire parish registers    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other parish records, e.g. Poor Law, church wardens' accounts | <input type="checkbox"/> Electoral registers from 1832 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early and printed map collection                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographic collection       |

### **Part 3: Skills and training**

**9.** If you have been unable to fully answer a local studies query in the past, have you: (tick all that apply)

- ☐ Apologised to the customer that you couldn't help them- no further action
- ☐ Referred to a colleague in your library
- ☐ Referred to History Centre
- ☐ Referred to Salisbury Local Studies Department
- ☐ Referred to Wiltshire Online services
- ☐ Referred to other organisation (e.g. local history society)
- ☐ Referred to general internet

**10.** On a scale of 1-5 (where 1 is not at all confident and 5 is very confident) how confident are you in providing the local studies services listed below? Please circle 'n/a' if your library does not provide a service.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |     |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Local interest book stock<br>(using Wiltshire classification,<br>e.g. AAA.350, SAR.725) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Parish registers on fiche   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Census returns on fiche   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Historical newspapers   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Trade directories e.g. Kelly's  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |

|                     |   |   |   |   |   |     |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Historical maps     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Electoral register  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Ephemera collection | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |
| Wiltshire Wills     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | n/a |

11. On a scale of 1-5 (where 1 is not at all confident and 5 is very confident) how confident are you in using the online services listed below to assist with local studies enquiries? Please circle '0' if you were not aware the service is available.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ancestry library edition                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| Wiltshire Community History database                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| Debrett's Peerage and Baronetage                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| The Times Digital Archive                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> century British Newspapers                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| Wiltshire Treasures   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| Directing customers to other family/ local history websites | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 |

12. When did you last receive local studies training? (please circle)

|   |                       |               |                       |
|---|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Course provided by History Centre staff</b>        |                       |               |                       |
| never   | more than 5 years ago | 2-5 years ago | less than 2 years ago |
| <b>Informal 'on the job' training from colleagues</b> |                       |               |                       |
| never   | more than 5 years ago | 2-5 years ago | less than 2 years ago |
| <b>Visit to History Centre</b>                        |                       |               |                       |
| never   | more than 5 years ago | 2-5 years ago | less than 2 years ago |
| <b>Visit to Salisbury Local Studies library</b>       |                       |               |                       |
| never   | more than 5 years ago | 2-5 years ago | less than 2 years ago |



**Other (please specify)**

**13.** How useful do/ would you find the following types of training? (1= not at all useful, 5= very useful)

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Full day courses provided by History Centre staff | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Half day courses provided by History Centre staff | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| On-the-job training                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Visit to History Centre                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Visit to Salisbury Local Studies Library          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Job shadowing                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Online training package                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Weekly tips 'How to...' / 'Did you know...'       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 'Getting started in...' factsheets                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**14.** How often do you feel a refresher course is necessary to maintain your enquiry skills?

- ☐ Every year
- ☐ Every two years
- ☐ Every three - five years
- ☐ After five or more years
- ☐ Other (please specify)

.....

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**15. Any other comments.....**

Please use this space to comment further on any aspects of local studies provision or training.

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please contact Karen Nashwalder:

[Contact details removed for confidentiality]

## **APPENDIX 2- Interview information and schedule**

You are being invited to take part in a research project for a Masters Dissertation (MScEcon Information and Library Studies, Department of Information Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth). Before you confirm your participation, please take time to read this information sheet carefully.

### **Introduction to the study**

I am a postgraduate student at the Department of Information Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth and I will be conducting the study. I am currently working as Librarian at Salisbury Library. The study will explore the subject of local studies provision in public libraries, in particular, the role of the public library in an authority where a specialist history centre also exists; and staff training requirements for public library staff. Wiltshire library service is being used as a case study. The research for this study involves:

- A questionnaire to be distributed to all frontline library staff assessing current local studies knowledge and skills.
- Interviews with managers and local studies specialists at both the History Centre and in the library service to assess managers' perceptions of the role of public libraries in local studies provision.

### **How the data will be used**

- The data gathered as a result of the study will be used in my Masters dissertation research.
- Data may potentially be used to inform and design future local studies training for public library staff in Wiltshire.

### **Your involvement in the study**

You have been chosen to take part in this study due to your position in the case study authority as a manager and/or local studies specialist. Your area of

expertise and responsibility within the service will provide valuable insights relevant to the research questions.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. To help me record that you are willing to take part in this study, please complete the attached consent form. Please note that if you consent to take part in the study, you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason.

The study will consist of one semi-structured interview which should last between 30 and 45 minutes. This will take place at a location, date and time which are convenient for you. With your permission, I'd like to record the interview using a smartphone. Please note that you have the right to ask for the recording device to be switched off at any time during the interview.

### **Confidentiality, anonymity and data protection**

This study has been designed in accordance with the UWA Department of Information Studies' *Ethics Policy for Research* and the *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association*. Any quotations used in the dissertation will be anonymous and recordings and interview transcripts will be destroyed on completion of the dissertation.

### **Contact for further information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me:

[Contact details removed for confidentiality]

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Karen Nashwalder

11 February 2013.

## **Interview Schedule**

### **Part One: Local studies services in public libraries and history centres**

- Do you think that local studies provision is an important part of a public library service?
- Given the nature of some of the materials and the level of specialism required, can public libraries adequately provide a local studies service?
- What role do you think public libraries have in the provision of local studies services where there is a centralised specialist service in the same authority?
- How do you think a centralised collection impacts on the collections and services provided in public library branches?
- Do you think the differences in service provision between public libraries and history centres are adequately defined- is it clear for staff and customers what level of service they can expect in a public library compared to a specialist centre?

### **Part Two: Staff training**

- What do you think the implications are for local studies collections and services in public libraries where there are no specialist or even professionally qualified staff?
- Do you think public library staff consider local studies skills to be necessary to their job?
- To what extent do you think increased digitisation of local studies material and web-based resources will impact staff training in public libraries?
- Do you think there is adequate local studies training for both professional and non-professional staff in public libraries?
- Do you have any thoughts about how staff skills can be improved?

## APPENDIX 3: Excerpt of Interview 3 showing highlighting and coding by theme

### Codes for transcripts

| Theme                                      | Code |
|--|------|
| Access & preservation.....                 | 1    |
| Community identity & cohesion.....         | 2    |
| Resources (lack of).....                   | 3    |
| Library provision.....                     | 4    |
| History centres.....                       | 5    |
| Unique material/ collection.....           | 6    |
| Staff (knowledge/skills/satisfaction)..... | 7    |
| Promotion.....                             | 8    |
| Internet.....                              | 9    |
| Training.....                              | 10   |

### Coded extract from Interview 3

KN: Do you think that local studies provision is an important part of a public library service?

I3: You want more than just 'yes', don't you? Yes, for quite a few reasons, one of the most important is that the majority of people who are interested in history of Wiltshire, in any aspect and that includes family history, aren't actually going to get to the HC, so the library or the internet is their only port of call, and I have to say, that a lot of the information on the internet both family and local is not terribly good- other than the community history of course, so it is important to have a selection of material that they can look at both hard copy and online at the library because most people are not going to go any further than that point. And it's also interesting for the staff because obviously all enquiries have decreased in libraries over the last few years including local studies ones, but that actually gives them something very pertinent to themselves to be involved

in- I think it's important from a staff point of view- it gives them a sense of belonging to that library and that place if they have some material on their own locality. And the other point of course is that is likely to be the only, not unique material, but the only material that's possibly quite different from the stock of any other library that they will have. I mean obviously that's more a Wiltshire libraries as against other libraries but I'm afraid that the stock of most libraries is interchangeable throughout the country but the local stock is very individualistic to that authority and that library.

KN: So given the specialist nature of a lot of the service and the materials, do you think public libraries are in a position to adequately provide the level of service required- do you think they're sort of up to the...

I3: No, I'm afraid not for most of them. Largely because the decrease of resources, human resources mainly, that there's not the professional staff available nowadays. In fact there aren't enough staff available for this. Also because collections have had to be cut down because again they're not generating issues, therefore they are an easy thing to cut to make the statistics look better...and I think probably in today's market with so much material available on the web, most libraries could not really carry the amount of stock they would need to to provide an adequate service, so possibly that's three things: human resources, financial resources, and the availability of material elsewhere, really make that very difficult. On the other hand, of course, if staff are well-trained and know the good internet resources they will be able to use those to satisfy quite a few enquiries- I'm trying to think both local and family history here, but if we're talking printed resources you cannot really do much in the way of family history- even if you had transcripts and all the parish registers you couldn't house them in one library you'd only be able to have the ones suitable for that area and people can come in wanting anything so that's just impossible.

#### **APPENDIX 4- Interviewee consent form**

##### **Consent form**

**Title of project:** Masters Dissertation: Local studies provision in public libraries

**Name of researcher:** Karen Nashwalder

**Project authority:** This research project is being undertaken as part of an MSc in Information and Library Studies from Aberystwyth University.

- |  | <b>Please tick</b>       |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read and understood the information letter for participants.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have received enough information about what my role involves.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my decision to consent is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to the use of any anonymised direct quotes in the report.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I consent to participate in this study about local studies provision in public libraries.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|   |                  |             |
|---|------------------|-------------|
| <b>Name of participant (IN BLOCK LETTERS)</b> | <b>Signature</b> | <b>Date</b> |
| <b>Name of researcher (IN BLOCK LETTERS)</b>  | <b>Signature</b> | <b>Date</b> |

**Please return this Consent Form to:**

Karen Nashwalder, [Contact details removed for confidentiality]